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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

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Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 46/182, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report annually to the Assembly and the Economic and Social Council on the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance. The report is also submitted in response to Assembly resolution 65/133 and Economic and Social Council resolution 2010/1.

The report describes the major humanitarian trends and challenges over the past year and analyses two thematic issues of current concern: strengthening resilience, preparedness and capacities for humanitarian response; and humanitarian financing. The report provides an overview of current key processes to improve humanitarian coordination and ends with recommendations for the further strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 46/182 and responds to the requests contained in Assembly resolution 65/133 and Economic and Social Council resolution 2010/1. The period covered by the report is June 2010 to May 2011.

II. Overview of humanitarian trends and challenges

2. Twenty years after General Assembly resolution 46/182 laid out a framework for the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations, humanitarian needs continue to increase as a result of new and ongoing conflicts, the increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters and the impact of global challenges. Working in support of Governments and in close collaboration with humanitarian partners, the United Nations responded to more than 30 emergencies during the reporting period.

3. Complex emergencies continued to affect tens of millions of people, causing displacement both within and across borders. At the end of 2010, an estimated 27.5 million people remained internally displaced by armed conflict globally, representing an increase of 400,000 compared with 2009. Of these, up to 50 per cent were children, and many displaced persons were living in urban areas. Africa had the highest number of internally displaced persons, an estimated 11.1 million. Despite the fact that the overall number of displaced persons was steadily rising, at least 2.1 million were able to return home in 2010. The number of refugees under the mandate of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had increased by an estimated 140,000 to 10.5 million by the end of 2010. New or renewed conflicts across sub-Saharan Africa, in particular in Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Côte d'Ivoire, accounted for this increase. Some 14.7 million internally displaced persons were being protected and/or assisted by UNHCR at the end of 2010.

4. An increase in the number of natural disasters was recorded in 2010. The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters reported that 373 natural disasters occurred (compared with 328 recorded in 2009), killing nearly 297,000 people, affecting almost 208 million others and causing an estimated $110 billion in damages. The number of people affected increased significantly from 113 million in 2009, owing to the growing scale of the disasters, in part as a result of climate change. According to the World Meteorological Organization, global surface temperatures reached record values in 2010 (as they had in 1998 and 2005), while global land rainfall also peaked.

5. The combined impact of global challenges and trends — such as climate change, food and energy price volatility, macroeconomic trends, irregular migration, rapid population growth, urbanization and environmental degradation — continues to exacerbate vulnerability and increase humanitarian needs. More than 3.3 billion people — the majority of the world's population — live in urban areas, with more than 1 billion living in slums and informal settlements, which makes them particularly vulnerable to humanitarian crises. Droughts and floods in key food-producing countries contributed to rapid and sustained increases in international food prices from the middle of 2010. In the second half of 2010, food

price increases, compounded by fuel price spikes, resulted in a net increase of some 44 million in the number of people in low and middle income countries living in extreme poverty. The increase in food prices also led to a deepening of poverty for many of the 1.2 billion people who were already living below the extreme poverty line of $1.25 a day. Increases in the prices of food and other commodities are contributing to unrest in an increasing number of countries, but it is generally difficult to separate that factor from others.

A. Complex emergencies

6. In the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, the security situation remains extremely volatile, resulting in a serious humanitarian situation. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), as at 7 May, at least 710,408 people, 263,290 of them foreign migrant workers, had left the country. Inside the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, there is ongoing concern about the protection of civilians in areas of intense fighting, and there are reports of 200,000 displaced people, most of them living with host families.

7. It is estimated that the recent political turmoil in Yemen has led to the deaths of 135 people, including 26 children, and the injury of 2,656, including 800 children. Even before the recent protests, humanitarian needs in Yemen were widespread and growing. Challenges include insecurity in the north, lack of sustained access to thousands of internally displaced persons and widespread and worrying levels of food insecurity and malnutrition. Protracted conflict in the north has led to the displacement of 300,000 people.

8. Despite the easing by Israel of the blockade on Gaza, access by the population to sources of livelihood remained limited, owing to a large extent to the ongoing restrictions on the import of primary construction materials and the export of goods, as well as on people's access to farming land and fishing areas within Gaza and its sea waters. As a result, the majority of the population continues to suffer from food insecurity and remains dependent on food assistance. In Area C of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, there is inadequate planning by the Israeli authorities to meet the basic housing and infrastructure needs of Palestinian residents. This has resulted in poor services and living conditions, as well as in the continuous exposure of thousands of families living in houses without Israeli-issued permits to the risk of demolition and displacement.

9. In Iraq, the United Nations and its partners continue to address the needs of particularly vulnerable groups. The United Nations estimates that there are still 1.3 million Iraqi internally displaced persons, and hundreds of thousands of refugees living in neighbouring countries. Gradual improvements inside Iraq have not yet reached a level that enables large-scale voluntary and sustainable returns.

10. In Afghanistan, humanitarian needs as a result of both conflict and natural disasters remain high. While in some instances access for non-governmental organizations has improved, humanitarian access has deteriorated on the whole, owing to increased security incidents, in particular in the north and north-east of the country. The humanitarian response was significantly hampered by insecurity, including attacks against humanitarian workers, in particular the attack against the United Nations compound in Mazar-e-Sharif on 1 April 2011, in which seven United Nations staff and security officers were killed. The number of security incidents

increased by 19 per cent compared with 2009. Conflict-induced displacement was on the rise in 2010 and early 2011, resulting in an estimated 360,000 internally displaced persons, 102,000 of whom have been newly displaced since 2009. A significant number (perhaps 40 per cent) of Afghan returnees from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan are still in need of reintegration support and many (perhaps 28 per cent) are in dire need of humanitarian assistance.

11. Although the response to the 2010 monsoon floods dominated humanitarian efforts in Pakistan during the reporting period, humanitarian organizations continue to provide emergency and early recovery assistance to conflict-affected populations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. While a large number of internally displaced persons have returned to their homes, significant humanitarian needs persist, as approximately 820,000 people remain displaced in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and at least 1 million people inside the Federally Administered Tribal Areas continue to require early recovery support in order to further promote the process of their return.

12. The Central African Republic continues to face serious humanitarian challenges. The number of internally displaced persons has risen to 192,000 owing to renewed violence in parts of the north and attacks by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in the east. In neighbouring Chad, 262,000 Sudanese refugees remain in need of humanitarian assistance. Internal displacement also remains an issue there, with 130,000 internally displaced persons still in camps. Chad was one of the countries worst affected by the Sahel food crisis, which caused up to 1.6 million people to be food-insecure.

13. Côte d'Ivoire was plunged into a political crisis following the holding of the second round of presidential elections on 28 November 2010, triggering widespread unrest which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of people and injuries to many more. By mid-April, up to 1 million people had been internally displaced and many Ivorians had fled to neighbouring countries, in particular Liberia, where more than 130,000 people sought refuge. While safe access to the affected populations and the protection of civilians were among the major humanitarian issues for Côte d'Ivoire, poor infrastructure and the scattering of refugees in hard-to-access border communities represented important operational challenges in Liberia.

14. The humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains serious, with a total of 1.7 million internally displaced persons. In North and South Kivu, persistent violence by armed groups resulted in large-scale humanitarian needs, and an estimated 1.3 million people remained displaced in the Kivus alone. Humanitarian access to the affected populations continued to be extremely challenging. An estimated 120,000 people from Equateur Province, who fled to the Congo and the Central African Republic as a result of local ethnic conflict in late 2009 and in 2010, have yet to return. LRA continued to terrorize people across vast remote areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with 251 persons killed in 2010 alone. An estimated 380,000 persons remained displaced in LRA-affected areas across the Central African Republic, the Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

15. It is estimated that, in the Darfur region of the Sudan, in addition to the existing 1.9 million internally displaced persons, more than 70,000 people may have been displaced as a result of renewed violence. Insecurity, a new wave of expulsions of staff of humanitarian organizations and bureaucratic impediments further

restricted humanitarian access. The Southern Sudan self-determination referendum proceeded peacefully in January 2011, and 300,000 southerners returned from the North before and after it was held. However, intercommunal conflict, attacks by LRA and clashes between the Sudan People's Liberation Army and militia groups, which have become increasingly active since the referendum, have reportedly displaced 154,000 people in total and killed at least 1,400 people.

16. Ongoing conflict, food insecurity and the effects of drought have severely affected the livelihoods and coping mechanisms of people in Somalia. Significant numbers of people have continued to leave Somalia to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. Currently, some 2.4 million Somalis, or 32 per cent of the population, need humanitarian assistance and livelihood support. Restrictions on aid operations by armed groups hinder the ability of humanitarian agencies to operate. The conflict is generating significant civilian casualties owing to the lack of compliance by all parties with their obligations under international law.

17. Despite the gradual move towards recovery in Zimbabwe, more than 1.7 million people required food aid during the peak hunger season (January to March), while various vulnerable groups will continue to require targeted humanitarian assistance. Access to safe water and sanitation remains a problem for millions, and the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate remains one of the highest in the world.

18. In Colombia, 111,684 people were displaced in 2010 as a result of armed conflict and activities by groups that emerged following the demobilization process. According to official sources, the number of internally displaced persons in Colombia is among the highest in the world, at 3.6 million.

B. Disasters associated with natural hazards

19. Several geophysical disasters brought destruction during the reporting period. On 11 March 2011, a 9.0 magnitude earthquake hit the north-eastern region of Japan, followed by a 10-metre-high tsunami. As at 1 May, the Government had confirmed that 14,704 had died, 5,278 had been injured and 10,969 were missing. The subsequent difficulties at the Fukushima nuclear power plant caused an increase in the radiation levels in the surrounding areas. As at 28 April, 168,901 persons remained evacuated from the affected areas. In New Zealand, a 6.3 magnitude earthquake hit on 22 February 2011, causing 166 deaths and destroying and damaging more than 100,000 homes. In Indonesia, the Mount Merapi volcano erupted twice in October-November, resulting in 386 deaths and the displacement of 410,388 people. On 25 October 2010, a 7.2 magnitude earthquake struck the Mentawai islands, followed by a tsunami which killed 460 and displaced 15,353 people and destroyed thousands of houses.

20. In Haiti, the ongoing efforts to recover from the devastating earthquake of January 2010 were further hampered by a cholera outbreak which began in October 2010. By May 2011, the epidemic had stabilized in many areas and the mortality rate had declined to 1.7 per cent nationwide; the epidemic had caused over 4,800 deaths, with a total of more than 280,000 cases. Hurricane Tomas, which developed in late October 2010 and had become a tropical storm by the time it reached Haiti, caused less damage and disruption to humanitarian efforts than expected. More than 600,000 people still live in camps in the wake of the earthquake.

21. The 2010 monsoon season caused the worst floods in the history of Pakistan, affecting more than 20.5 million people (10 per cent of the population), destroying more than 1.8 million homes and devastating over 2.4 million hectares of crops. Many of those who were displaced have returned to their areas of origin, although support gaps remain in various sectors. In Sri Lanka, unprecedented levels of rainfall in early 2011 caused floods, landslides and displacement in the eastern and central parts, affecting 1.2 million people; more than 1 million were displaced at the peak of the floods. In Australia, the worst flooding in 50 years, compounded by the effects of Cyclone Yasi, caused 20 deaths and affected millions of people. Torrential rainfall resulted in flooding in Thailand and Viet Nam in October, affecting more than 477,000 and 210,000 households, respectively. In Colombia, the heaviest rainfall on record triggered deadly floods and landslides that had affected more than 2 million people by the end of 2010. Many other countries and regions were affected by a number of small- and medium-scale disasters related to rainfall, tropical storms, droughts and extreme weather events.

22. Almost 2 million people were affected by Typhoon Megi, which struck the Philippines on 18 October, destroying 30,206 houses and damaging 115,584 others. Also in October, Cyclone Giri struck Myanmar, affecting 260,000 people and leaving 100,000 homeless.

23. In the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the food security situation has deteriorated and a United Nations assessment in March 2011 found that 6.1 million people would be in need of food assistance between May and September 2011. Among the many factors that contributed to the deteriorating food security situation were natural hazards, including the heavy rains and floods experienced in mid-2010 and the severe weather in the winter of 2010/11. Significant needs were also reported in the health, water and sanitation sectors.

24. The regional flood and cyclone season began in Southern Africa with heavy rains, resulting in the highest river levels in decades in Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Thanks to the strengthening of national early warning systems and improved intergovernmental cooperation on emergency preparedness and response through the Southern Africa Development Community, the impact of the flooding was not as severe as anticipated. More than 1.6 million people were affected by extreme rainfall and flooding in West Africa. The Niger, already beset by a prolonged drought and associated acute food shortages, suffered further owing to flash floods in July 2010, while in Benin torrential rains and the worst flooding in 50 years affected 680,000 people and rendered hundreds of thousands homeless. La Niña-induced drought conditions and food insecurity affected approximately 80 per cent of the population of Eritrea and 2.8 million people in Ethiopia. In Kenya, 1.6 million people required humanitarian assistance as a result of recurrent drought, conflict and localized flooding. The rise in global surface temperatures became evident in the Russian Federation, where a devastating heat wave affected millions and triggered massive forest and peat fires in the summer of 2010.

III. Current challenges

25. Predictions that the population will reach 8 billion in 2025 (increasing mostly in the developing world), that a 50 per cent increase in food production will be

required by 2030, that there will be a 50 per cent increase in energy consumption by 2030 and that safe water could be inaccessible to almost 50 per cent of the world's population by 2025 suggest that there will likely be significant increases in vulnerability and humanitarian needs in the regions most affected. The United Nations and its partners will have to continuously adapt to this changing world, in particular through strengthening partnerships with all stakeholders, especially Governments. Increasingly, this will mean a shift from a reactive system that responds to emergencies to a more prepared and anticipatory system with stronger links to Governments and local structures as well as development actors. Humanitarian financing mechanisms will also need to be adapted to ensure predictable and adequate funding to meet increased humanitarian needs and to address gaps in such areas as supporting preparedness activities and enabling an effective transition between relief and longer-term recovery.

A. Strengthening resilience, preparedness and capacities for humanitarian response

26. Preparedness for emergency response saves lives when emergencies occur because it permits faster scaling-up of an effective, principled and coordinated humanitarian response at the local, national and international levels. Requirements for emergency response preparedness are likely to increase as global risks and trends continue to exacerbate vulnerability. Large-scale humanitarian emergencies, such as the earthquake in Haiti and the floods in Pakistan in 2010, demonstrate the urgency of ensuring an adequate level of preparedness in disaster-prone countries. The impact of preparedness and prevention is difficult to measure. However, the earthquakes in Japan and Chile in early 2011 clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of preparedness in saving lives; the consequences could have been even more severe than they were. Similarly, while floods and other hydrometeorological disasters cannot be avoided, the systematic upgrading of preparedness measures, plans and response capacities, including in Bangladesh, Mozambique and some countries in the Caribbean, have resulted in significantly reduced loss of life and livelihoods.

27. It is generally understood that preparedness for emergency response entails measures and activities in advance of emergencies to establish capacities and mechanisms for rapid and effective response during emergencies. The primary responders are national and local authorities. As outlined in General Assembly resolution 46/182, the international community should assist countries in strengthening their response capacities. In order to be effective, international preparedness efforts must reinforce national and local response capacities and support existing national and local institutions and communities. At the same time, humanitarian organizations should continue to improve their own response capacities in order to carry out their functions as effectively as possible. There is also a need to increase clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of the various actors engaged in preparedness.

28. The Hyogo Framework for Action, adopted by Member States in 2005, in particular under its priority 5, advocates strengthening preparedness for response at all levels and highlights the essential role that preparedness can play in saving lives and livelihoods, especially when clearly anchored in a comprehensive national disaster risk reduction strategy. Efforts to build the local capacities of disaster-prone and disaster-affected communities must be intensified and existing national and

local capacities incorporated into humanitarian coordination systems, as the larger humanitarian system also better equips itself for a future of greater risk, uncertainty and demand.

Developing response capacity for preparedness at the regional, national and local levels

29. The United Nations system continues to work on increasing support to Governments and regional organizations for preparedness, in particular in disaster-prone regions. One example is the implementation of minimum preparedness measures at the national and regional levels. In the Southern Africa region, humanitarian partners have been working with the Southern African Development Community secretariat to provide training to member States, develop common tools, policies and strategies for region-wide application for preparedness and reach agreement on hazard scenarios to facilitate planning at the national and regional levels. The United Nations is also conducting simulation exercises in Africa designed to enhance the operability of regional logistics networks.

30. In the Asia-Pacific region, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is currently piloting a country-level integrated preparedness package for emergency response. Following the identification of specific preparedness needs in target countries, the Office aims to provide support to humanitarian partners and Governments in key areas such as the establishment of coordination structures, contingency planning, data preparedness and needs assessment readiness. This approach is aimed at delivering comprehensive preparedness support that creates a clear linkage between preparedness actions and positive humanitarian response outcomes. Similarly, the United Nations and partners have organized training sessions on humanitarian response and coordination tools for organizations in the Gulf region. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs developed a concise guide for Governments, outlining international response mechanisms and services at their disposal in case of disasters, and supported training for humanitarian country team members and Government representatives from various countries across the region, facilitating information exchange and a common understanding of emergency response tools and processes.

31. In West Africa, humanitarian agencies have recently come together under the Strategic Partnership for Preparedness; the pilot project was implemented during 2010 with regional stakeholders. Capacity-development activities are undertaken in-country, supported by regional and global partners. In the first pilot country, Ghana, the emergency preparedness and response capacity assessment performed in October 2010 led to revised United Nations Development Assistance Framework components in January 2011, to an action plan for 2011-2012 based on five key recommendations and to a national simulation exercise, conducted in May 2011.

32. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee principals agreed in February 2011 that the Committee should place a greater emphasis on preparedness and disaster risk reduction. In 2011, the members of the Committee's Sub-Working Group on Preparedness will support national contingency planning processes in a selected number of countries. As of April 2011, Ghana, Nepal, Uganda and Haiti had been selected as initial pilot countries. The Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery of the World Bank has also pledged to provide technical and financial support for disaster preparedness and risk reduction in a number of high-risk

countries. The Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative is another example of an inter-agency effort to provide advisory services, technical guidance and training and to exchange knowledge.

33. It is essential to strengthen the analysis of early warning information at the national and international levels through cooperation among States and partnerships between United Nations entities and research institutions. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee "Early Warning — Early Action" report is published three times a year and an updated version of the Humanitarian Early Warning Service was launched, with enhanced early warning information on natural hazards.

Strengthening international networks and mechanisms for a more efficient response

34. Existing global networks and inter-agency frameworks, such as the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG), the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team and United Nations Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination (UN-CMCoord), have continued to support Governments in their response to disasters. INSARAG guidelines and methodologies have now been adopted by the majority of the world's international urban search and rescue responders. In 2010, the UNDAC team organized two disaster response preparedness missions and conducted 10 emergency missions. Approximately 250 disaster managers are available for UNDAC missions. Under the UN-CMCoord framework, which provides for coordination between the humanitarian and military communities, a combination of training and familiarization modules has been delivered, thereby preparing a variety of humanitarian and military actors for emergency response. Similarly, the agreement reached in the context of the Asia-Pacific Conference on Military Assistance to Disaster Relief Operations includes strategic guidance, as well as a frame of reference, for humanitarian organizations and Government counterparts regarding the engagement of military actors in support of humanitarian response.

35. The United Nations continued its cooperation with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in encouraging and supporting Governments to make use of the Guidelines for the Domestic Facilitation and Regulation of International Disaster Relief and Initial Recovery Assistance. During the reporting period, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs continued its collaboration with the Federation and the Inter-Parliamentary Union with a view to developing model domestic legislation for enhanced preparedness for emergency response and the more efficient facilitation and regulation of international disaster assistance.

Preparedness in the context of increasing vulnerabilities

36. It is now widely accepted that global challenges, such as climate change, food and energy price volatility, macroeconomic trends, irregular migration, rapid population growth, urbanization and environmental degradation, are contributing to increasing vulnerability and humanitarian need, as well as a rapidly changing landscape for humanitarian organizations.

37. In order to prevent and mitigate adverse impacts resulting from global challenges, humanitarian actors increasingly seek to analyse and monitor them and their effects on vulnerability to anticipate where and when humanitarian caseloads

may emerge or increase. This information can then be used to make more timely and appropriate interventions, including contingency planning, building national response capacity and other preparedness activities. Owing to the complexity of these trends, humanitarian actors will increasingly need to enter into partnerships with local authorities and other stakeholders, development and specialist agencies, international financial institutions and research organizations to improve their access to high-quality analysis and their understanding of community resilience and existing coping mechanisms.

38. During the reporting period, agencies continued to improve monitoring and analysis of global challenges that have an impact on humanitarian needs and situations. For example, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee endorsed its first strategy and action plan for meeting humanitarian challenges in urban areas. Humanitarian agencies working with development partners through the High-level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis worked to undertake joint analysis of the impacts of high prices on vulnerable people and to prioritize mitigation actions.

B. Humanitarian financing

39. Despite the effects of the global recession, in 2010 humanitarian aid contributions from Member States and the private sector continued to increase. At least 140 countries, as well as private sector organizations and individuals, contributed towards a total of $15.6 billion[1] in funding both within and outside the consolidated appeals process framework. This represented an increase of $4 billion compared with the funding levels reported in 2009 and is in part accounted for by the high levels of support for humanitarian emergencies in Haiti and Pakistan. A growing number of Member States are providing resources for humanitarian action, including some that are aid recipients themselves. However, overall funding in relation to need (as measured by contributions to the consolidated appeals process) declined from 73 per cent in 2006 to 63 per cent in 2010.

40. As set out in the principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship, donors are encouraged to continue to work together to collectively allocate funding in proportion to needs and on the basis of needs assessments, as well as to provide funding in a flexible manner so that agencies on the ground can provide assistance where it is needed most. While the Central Emergency Response Fund window for underfunded crises had an important levelling effect on discrepancies across sectors, more should be done to ensure that all sectors are adequately resourced with unearmarked contributions.

Improvements to the humanitarian financing system

41. Almost 20 years since General Assembly resolution 46/182 created the consolidated appeals process and the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (the precursor to the Central Emergency Response Fund), Member States and the United Nations and its partners continue to make progress towards greater predictability and efficiency in humanitarian financing. Predictable humanitarian financing includes the availability of sufficient unearmarked funds to allow a flexible, needs-based allocation of resources and rapid access to additional funds when

[1] As recorded by the Financial Tracking Service (http://fts.unocha.org/) as at 11 April 2011.

necessary. Improvements have been achieved in terms of both the level and scope of funding provided by Member States and the tools and mechanisms available to mobilize, coordinate and allocate resources.

42. Among the financing mechanisms established in recent years are pooled funds, including the Central Emergency Response Fund and country-based pooled funds, namely, common humanitarian funds and emergency response funds, as well as other mechanisms, such as the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Additional innovative mechanisms, such as the advance financing systems that allow for internal borrowing used by some United Nations agencies, funds and programmes greatly enhance agency response times in an emergency situation.

43. Multilateral pooled funds are mechanisms by means of which donors provide unearmarked contributions to a common source from which allocations are made according to commonly defined strategic priorities, thereby contributing to increasingly adequate, timely and flexible funding for humanitarian activities. Between 2006 and 2010, humanitarian pooled funding mechanisms (both Central Emergency Response Fund and country-based funds) received more than $3.8 billion, accounting for approximately 7 per cent of the total humanitarian contributions made during the period.

44. In 2010, the accountability and effectiveness of these funding mechanisms were further strengthened. The roll-out of the Performance and Accountability Framework for the Central Emergency Response Fund is expected to provide an overview of the impact of the Fund at the country level. Furthermore, a comprehensive evaluation of the Fund following its first five years in operation is currently under way. The monitoring of country-based pooled funds has also been strengthened. An evaluation of common humanitarian funds was finalized in March 2011. The production of annual reports and standardized agreements and reporting will further enhance the transparency of those funds.

45. The consolidated appeals process has evolved significantly over the years. Particular attention is paid to ensuring that needs assessments are closely aligned with the process, country strategies and the overall programme cycle. For example, consolidated appeals process planning tools will be aligned with the outcomes of coordinated needs assessments. This will facilitate the use of requirements as a basis for developing programmes and projects and to cover needs without gaps and overlaps. Funding through established mechanisms, such as consolidated appeals process and pooled funds, contributes to improved predictability, strengthens the prioritization and allocation of resources on the basis of need and enhances accountability against collective results. Enhancing needs-based allocation also remains among the priority themes of the Good Humanitarian Donorship group.

46. Despite these major improvements to the humanitarian financing system, challenges remain in ensuring that the structure is able to effectively respond to current and future trends affecting humanitarian assistance. The financing of emergency preparedness remains an area of concern for the United Nations and its partners. Furthermore, in situations in countries emerging from conflict and fragility, sustained efforts are required to ensure the timely availability of development funding and that appropriate financing mechanisms are in place to support transition and early recovery. Further efforts are required to make better use of the resources and capacities that exist within civil society.

Funding for preparedness

47. Despite widespread recognition of the need to strengthen the capacity of Governments and local communities to prevent and prepare for humanitarian crises, funding for preparedness is often ad hoc and inconsistent. Appropriate and well-resourced financing mechanisms need to be put in place to fund preparedness activities. Donors are encouraged to provide predictable resources for preparedness measures. At the same time, Governments and local actors in disaster-prone countries are encouraged to strengthen their preparedness measures, while international actors should continue supporting them in accessing appropriate financing mechanisms. Although this should focus primarily on the use of development assistance funding for preparedness and risk reduction, it will also require efforts by humanitarian partners to dedicate to preparedness some resources received through appeals.

48. A task team under the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Humanitarian Financing Group is currently working to track and stimulate funding for preparedness through existing United Nations humanitarian funding mechanisms. In-country case studies designed to demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of investing in preparedness and to highlight further practical solutions for improving preparedness funding are also being undertaken in close collaboration with interested Member States and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Sub-Working Group on Preparedness.

Transition financing

49. Adequate funding for situations of conflict and fragility saves lives, but it can also help to build the foundations for sustainable recovery, peace and national capacity. Despite significant contributions from Member States for assistance to conflict-affected States, the amount of resources dedicated to supporting transition has not been sufficient. Funding for recovery activities is often delayed and limited, which in turn leads to the extension of humanitarian programmes.

50. The United Nations and its partners, including the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, are developing system-wide guidance for future improvements in this area. In addition, the United Nations is working with members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development through the International Network on Conflict and Fragility to develop transition financing guidance hinged on promoting national priorities driven by respective Governments in partnership with donors, the multilateral system and its partners. This work is supported by the task team on financing and aid effectiveness within the Joint Working Group on Transition Issues of the United Nations Development Group and the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs, in coordination with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Humanitarian Financing Group. The main objective of the new guidance is to ensure the more efficient use of financial assistance by bringing together funding streams and various aid instruments in the most effective way.

51. While these initiatives help to improve the humanitarian financing system in response to current and future challenges, more needs to be done. Increased raising of awareness about growing needs is required to continue to mobilize donor support among Member States and the private sector. United Nations entities and partners are encouraged to support Member States in facilitating multilateral humanitarian

funding. New funding opportunities through regional and global entities, such as international financial institutions, should also be explored. Given that the global economic situation makes for a difficult humanitarian financing environment, Member States, the United Nations and partners will need to strengthen partnerships to deliver measurable results with the greatest impact to people in need through increasing the quantity and quality of funding.

IV. Progress in the coordination of humanitarian assistance

A. Strengthening the coordination of humanitarian assistance

Capacity and coordination in the field

52. In the past several years, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners were challenged to respond to a number of large-scale emergencies. The scale of the disasters in Haiti and Pakistan stretched the capacity of the humanitarian community to its limits. A number of common themes relating to the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance emerged from evaluations of these responses, including with regard to coordination.

53. Evaluation findings demonstrated the importance of ensuring the availability of resources needed for the comprehensive humanitarian response, foreseen in flash appeals. Dedicated human and financial resources — including commitments from donors — are needed to fulfil crucial roles in intra-cluster and inter-cluster coordination and to facilitate such vital processes as joint needs assessments and response strategies.

54. The involvement of national actors and affected populations in the coordination and provision of humanitarian response is necessary to ensure that humanitarian actors can respond adequately to real needs and protect the dignity of the affected population. However, recent evaluations unanimously concluded that the participation of national actors or affected populations in humanitarian response has been limited, and that this remains an important area for improvement. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Team on the Cluster Approach addresses issues such as working more effectively with national partners, ensuring greater participation of international and national non-governmental organizations and establishing coordination mechanisms for transition.

55. The findings of evaluations conducted in 2010 indicate that the cluster approach has had a positive effect on the quality of humanitarian response and in facilitating coordination efforts between the international community and Governments. The introduction of the cluster approach has strengthened leadership predictability and partnership among United Nations agencies, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, IOM and international non-governmental organizations. However, further improvements could be made to improve coordination. In addition, the ever-increasing number of humanitarian actors, as evidenced in particular in large-scale emergencies such as that in Haiti, requires that efforts be made to further strengthen leadership, streamline coordination mechanisms and increase commitment, accountability and transparency on the part of cluster members, and provide strong and disciplined intra- and inter-cluster coordination.

Enhancing humanitarian leadership

56. During the reporting period, the challenges posed to the humanitarian system by the series of large-scale disasters that occurred and by continuing protracted emergencies reinforced the argument that strong and predictable leadership are essential to an effective response. Key areas where progress needs to be made include strengthening the knowledge, skills and experience of resident coordinators and humanitarian coordinators, reinforcing the support provided to them and solidifying the mechanisms that they have at their disposal.

57. Well-trained and well-placed humanitarian coordinators are of the utmost importance; training initiatives and efforts to strengthen the pool of humanitarian coordinators, which has grown to include 39 individuals, need to be continued. Strengthening the effective performance management of humanitarian coordinators and resident coordinators performing humanitarian coordination functions is an area of increased focus. Sufficient and more predictable support should be provided to a number of resident coordinators working in disaster-prone countries so as to enable them to lead and coordinate both preparedness and response efforts. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee recently published a handbook for resident and humanitarian coordinators, which outlines the key actions they should take to prepare for and respond to emergencies.

58. The effectiveness of resident and humanitarian coordinators also depends on the capacity of the humanitarian country teams, members of which should strengthen their in-country management teams as necessary, in particular in the event of large-scale crises. Discussions are under way to establish a system under which humanitarian country teams would undertake peer reviews, as well as a performance framework for humanitarian action, through which the progressive achievement of collective results could be monitored and reported. The achievement of collective results must be in line with efforts aimed at improving accountability to affected populations.

Accountability to affected people

59. The United Nations and its humanitarian partners are increasing their accountability to affected populations. Affected populations are at the centre of humanitarian action, and their active participation is essential in providing assistance in ways that best meet their needs. Recent disasters have further highlighted the need for response organizations to prioritize consultation and communication with disaster-affected communities. United Nations entities and humanitarian partners are instituting internal accountability mechanisms to ensure that affected populations and local organizations are involved and consulted.

60. With the widespread availability of cost-effective technologies, a number of new approaches are being explored, such as the use of mobile telephones, call centres, free open-source software, social networking and technical and volunteer communities. In addition, several important initiatives, such as the 2011 revised Sphere Handbook,[2] by non-governmental organization partners, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and United Nations entities, as well as the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership initiative, offer tools,

[2] Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response, The Sphere Project, 2011.

guidelines and a rigorous voluntary certification scheme to ensure that programme delivery complies with the highest standards.

61. Strengthening the role of clusters in using and promoting participatory approaches has been prioritized in the 2011 workplan of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Team on the Cluster Approach. Under the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, principals of Inter-Agency Standing Committee members have committed their organizations to building into their internal practices the inclusion of affected people in programme planning and review, and the facilitation of the provision of feedback on the services offered by Inter-Agency Standing Committee organizations.

Harmonizing needs assessments

62. Harmonized and coordinated needs assessments are essential to improve the effectiveness of aid delivery to beneficiaries and accountability to stakeholders. They facilitate a shared analysis of the humanitarian situation by applying consistent methodologies and indicators and help ensure that gaps and duplication are minimized when conducting assessments with the affected population. To this end, the United Nations and its partners, through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Needs Assessment Task Force, finalized the operational guidance on coordinated assessments in emergencies, which provides a framework and tools for the coordination of needs assessments and the consolidation of assessment information.

63. While the guidance underscores the overall responsibilities of national authorities, it is aimed primarily at humanitarian country teams, cluster lead agencies and humanitarian organizations. Its implementation should support the formulation of appeals and strengthen linkages to post-conflict and disaster assessment efforts. The guidance is also applicable for emergencies not covered by an appeal, as well as preparedness contexts. The framework further provides a set of standardized indicators and tools, a data-consolidation tool, referred to as the "humanitarian dashboard", and a multi-cluster initial rapid assessment methodology that seeks to reach, within the first few days of an emergency, a shared understanding of the humanitarian situation, its scale and severity, and its likely evolution.

64. With support from an expanding standby capacity of needs assessment experts, the operational guidance and tools are being piloted during 2011 in at least four humanitarian emergency and four preparedness contexts. Guidance and tools will be adjusted on the basis of feedback from the field and lessons learned.

Emergency rules and procedures of the Secretariat for rapid humanitarian response

65. An integral part of effective humanitarian action is timely response. In 2010, the response of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to humanitarian emergencies, including the earthquake in Haiti and the floods in Pakistan, demonstrated the value of recent efforts to strengthen its ability to recruit and deploy staff quickly and flexibly. The Roster Management Programme enabled 85 per cent of field recruitments and a 12 per cent reduction of field vacancy rates. The average time for field selection was further reduced from 75 to 51 days, and transition from surge support to long-term staff planning was improved through enhanced internal and external coordination. More than 600 people were placed on

the roster. A new surge mechanism, the Associates Surge Pool, allowed for pre-cleared consultants and independent contractors to be deployed at short notice to cover interim staffing gaps, complementing the existing Emergency Response Roster and Standby Partnerships Programme. Altogether, those surge mechanisms provided for a total of 121 deployments over and above surge from regional offices.

66. In order to allow field staff to be more adequately and rapidly equipped, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in partnership with the United Nations Office at Geneva, launched "Acquisition Planning", a real-time online procurement database which enables the purchase of goods and services faster and in a more standardized fashion. The centralized rapid deployment stock, which serves as an internal strategic stockpile of operational support equipment and materials, has become fully operational. In 2010, it proved vital to the immediate mobilization of critical support equipment during emergencies.

Improving humanitarian civil-military coordination and the use of military assets

67. Recent experience in large-scale emergencies demonstrated the unique capabilities afforded by military actors, who are often well positioned to help support humanitarian action. The earthquake in Haiti and the floods in Pakistan served as a reminder that militaries can contribute timely, appropriate and unique assets to assist in the initial phases of humanitarian emergency response.

68. However, the challenges in maintaining the civilian character of humanitarian assistance remain, and are often amplified as a result of the provision of bilateral foreign military assistance. It is imperative that the provision of military assets to support humanitarian action take place in an appropriate, predictable and complementary manner so as to ensure that humanitarian needs can be addressed wherever they arise and in line with humanitarian principles.

69. The cornerstones of such principled humanitarian civil-military coordination are described in internationally established guidelines, and Member States should continue to recognize and adhere to their principles. While humanitarian actors continue to advocate that the Oslo Guidelines on the Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief and the Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets to Support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies (MCDA Guidelines) be part of national policy and military doctrine, Member States and military actors should focus on deploying military assets to address specific needs identified by the humanitarian community, as a last resort, respecting international guidelines and national guidance and in support of humanitarian action. These tenets have been applied in the Libyan context, where, although to date no requests for military support have been made, civil-military coordination has been effective, for example through deconfliction by exchanging information with armed actors to avoid potential hazards for humanitarian personnel.

70. Throughout the reporting period, UN-CMCoord has continued to provide for principled coordination between humanitarian and military actors through information-sharing, the avoidance of competition and, when appropriate, the pursuit of common goals. Recent experiences in coordinating with military actors have significantly increased the interest of Member States and generated proposals for new initiatives in support of effective humanitarian civil-military coordination. Steps will need to be taken to improve such coordination by addressing identified

gaps, including through the expansion of a pool of trained experts, increased training and enhanced dialogue between humanitarian and military/armed actors, a more effective, predictable and rapid civil-military interface in emergency response operations, and the further operationalization of the Oslo and MCDA Guidelines by developing contextual, country-specific guidance.

B. Strengthening compliance with humanitarian principles and access to populations

71. Humanitarian action should be conducted solely on the basis of need and in line with the core humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. Unfortunately, the ability of humanitarian actors to maintain a presence and safe and secure access to populations in need continues to be severely jeopardized in several humanitarian crisis situations. Constraints on access involve bureaucratic constraints, active hostilities, attacks on humanitarian personnel and the theft of assets.

72. Active hostilities in situations of armed conflict also pose challenges to safe and timely access to people in need. This underlines the importance of engagement by humanitarian actors with all parties to conflict in order to develop and implement measures to facilitate access during active hostilities. These include the creation of humanitarian corridors by parties to conflict, temporary suspensions of hostilities to allow the provision of urgent assistance to the affected population or the evacuation of civilians.

73. Violence directed at humanitarian personnel and facilities is both politically and economically motivated and is particularly debilitating for humanitarian operations. Over the past decade, major attacks — resulting in death, kidnapping and serious injury — against humanitarian relief personnel have tripled, reaching over 100 assaults a year every year since 2006. While international personnel face a higher incident rate per capita than national staff, the latter, who constitute over 90 per cent of staff in the field, have borne the brunt of security risks.

74. In 2010, a study by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs[3] reviewed good practice with regard to how humanitarian agencies in complex security environments can maintain presence and reach affected populations to deliver life-saving services and provide protection. Humanitarian actors on the ground have developed innovative risk management strategies — based on acceptance and complemented by security measures — including alternatives to "bunkerization", that have enabled them to maintain presence in proximity to affected communities. Proactive promotion of acceptance by building good relations with local communities constitutes a cornerstone of sound risk management. Acceptance-based approaches are a process rather than an event, and require sustained dialogue with all stakeholders — including all parties to a conflict — for which the support of Member States is essential. The principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence remain the core tenets of everyday humanitarian action on the ground.

75. Underpinning this enabling approach is an attitudinal shift from risk aversion to risk management that needs to take place at all decision-making levels and is now

[3] To Stay and Deliver, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2010.

reflected in the United Nations security management framework, which has progressed from a "when to leave" approach to one of "how to stay". In keeping with the principle that there should be "no programme without security" and "no security without resources",[4] security management — one of the most underfunded programme components — as well as measures to fulfil the duty towards care of national staff and local partners, need to be made an integral part of humanitarian appeal processes and programming.

C. Addressing gender equality and prevention of and response to gender-based violence in humanitarian action

76. Effective humanitarian assistance requires that women, girls, boys and men have equal access to and benefit from services and are not exposed to risks, including gender-based violence. Humanitarian organizations continue to provide capacity-building to partners to strengthen gender equality programming. Advisers from the Gender Standby Capacity roster have been deployed to 28 humanitarian situations to support humanitarian country teams in applying gender equality programming in humanitarian action. Thousands of humanitarian actors have completed the Inter-Agency Standing Committee gender e-learning course. In 2010 the Inter-Agency Standing Committee "gender marker" — a tool to improve humanitarian response by ensuring projects designed in the context of consolidated appeals processes and pooled funds fully take into account the different needs of women, girls, boys and men — was rolled out in 12 countries, resulting in a 300 per cent increase in the number of projects in which gender was mainstreamed.

77. Strengthened prevention and response to gender-based violence through regular coordination and targeted capacity development continue within the global protection cluster. A handbook for coordinating gender-based violence interventions and an Inter-Agency Standing Committee-endorsed training package were produced, while direct and timely field support was provided in five countries. A project on gender-based violence capacity development in humanitarian contexts was launched to strengthen the skills of humanitarian staff in addressing such violence in nine countries. The gender-based violence information management system, which is designed to collect and analyse standardized data on reported cases of such violence, is being used in five countries.

78. Integrating gender in inter-agency contingency planning and preparedness work is essential. Technical support is being provided through the Gender Standby Capacity programme to the Pacific and Southern African regions to support national capacity. Innovative strategies have also improved analysis in terms of who is impacted by crises and how involving all segments of the community improves contingency planning and response.

79. Cooking fuel remains a critical issue that touches on nearly every facet of daily life for millions of families. Because they are primarily responsible for collecting firewood and cooking, women and children are particularly vulnerable to a range of risks, including respiratory infections, rape and sexual assault, missed educational opportunities and environmental destruction. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Force on Safe Access to Firewood and Alternative Energy in

[4] See CEB/2009/1.

Humanitarian settings has ensured that the new Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves places a strong emphasis on a multisectoral approach to meeting cooking fuel needs in humanitarian emergencies and is now promoting efforts to ensure safe access to cooking fuel in crisis-affected settings around the world.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

80. On the basis of the above, I propose the following:

(a) Member States, non-State actors and humanitarian organizations are urged to promote greater respect for, and adherence to, the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence;

(b) Safe, timely and unhindered access to vulnerable populations is a prerequisite for the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance. Member States are urged to facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian personnel and supplies to affected communities;

(c) It is important that the United Nations system and humanitarian partners strengthen acceptance-based and principled measures that support the ability to maintain humanitarian presence and operations in high-risk environments. Security risk management should include promotion of acceptance by all relevant actors for humanitarian action, in particular through outreach to local communities, and be continually informed by ongoing context analysis;

(d) Member States are urged to continually reinforce their commitment to principled humanitarian action, including by ensuring adequate resources for comprehensive approaches to security risk management as part of humanitarian programming budgets, and to invest in further strengthening the United Nations security management system;

(e) It is important that the United Nations system strengthen the capacity for humanitarian leadership in emergencies, in particular the resident/humanitarian coordinator system, as well as humanitarian coordination mechanisms, including for the transition phase, including in support of national and local authorities as appropriate;

(f) Member States, the United Nations system and partners are encouraged to increase support for preparedness activities, including through strengthening partnerships with development organizations, and to further strengthen regional, national and local capacities and preparedness for responding to humanitarian emergencies. Member States should also consider additional ways of assessing progress in strengthening their preparedness levels for emergency response;

(g) Member States, the United Nations system and both humanitarian and development partners are encouraged to continue strengthening preparedness and risk reduction by further developing mechanisms to effectively detect and address humanitarian needs arising from the interaction of global challenges and other structural or chronic vulnerabilities;

(h) Member States are called upon to maintain a diversity of humanitarian funding channels, and to provide consistent and predictable support to these channels to meet existing and growing humanitarian needs. This includes the provision of early and multi-year commitments to humanitarian pooled funds as

well as support to humanitarian agencies' individual emergency reserves and other sources of funding for humanitarian programmes;

(i) Member States, the United Nations system and humanitarian partners are encouraged to continue to identify solutions to improve financing mechanisms to respond to transition; and Member States are encouraged to strengthen efforts to provide appropriate and flexible financing for preparedness activities;

(j) Member States and humanitarian organizations are reminded of the fundamental need to maintain the civilian character of emergency humanitarian assistance, and are asked to ensure that the use of foreign military assets is appropriate, timely, unique in capability and availability, and only at the request or with the consent of the affected State, in conformity with international law and humanitarian principles, as well as internationally established guidelines, such as the Oslo Guidelines, the MCDA Guidelines and country/context-specific guidance where present;

(k) Member States are encouraged to consult the humanitarian community and the Emergency Relief Coordinator, through established structures, when considering the deployment of foreign military assets to support humanitarian assistance, necessary to ensure appropriate resources are deployed to meet specific humanitarian needs;

(l) Member States are urged to strengthen efforts to address sexual and other forms of gender-based violence, including by preventing, investigating and prosecuting such violence in humanitarian emergencies, and ensure services to victims;

(m) The United Nations and humanitarian partners will strengthen the use of sex and age disaggregated data and continue to implement gender marker tools in humanitarian funding mechanisms in order to track funding allocations to gender and gender-based violence programming.

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Note verbale dated 6 May 2011 from the Permanent Mission of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Economic and Social Council

The Permanent Mission of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations presents its compliments to the President of the Economic and Social Council and has the honour to submit herewith its voluntary national presentation on the implementation of the internationally agreed goals and commitments on education, entitled "Venezuela: the world's largest classroom", for the annual ministerial review to be held during the high-level segment of the 2011 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council (see annex).

This national report will be presented by the Minister of the People's Power on Education during the voluntary national presentation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, to be held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, on 5 July 2011.

The Permanent Mission of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Council under item 2 (b) of the provisional agenda.

* E/2011/100.

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Annex to the note verbale dated 6 May 2011 from the Permanent Mission of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Economic and Social Council

[Original: Spanish]

Voluntary national presentation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the Economic and Social Council on the implementation of the internationally agreed goals and commitments on education

Venezuela: the world's largest classroom

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Summary

In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, education is a human right and a fundamental social duty; it is democratic and liberating. It is enshrined as such in the Constitution, which was approved by the people in an exercise of its sovereign powers through a referendum held on 15 December 1999. Education is compulsory and free from the preschool (kindergarten) level to the intermediate level, and undergraduate university education is also free at State institutions. At all levels, education is converted into a social inclusion mechanism that ensures the full integration of vulnerable groups.

At the present time, after 11 years of the Bolivarian Revolution, Venezuela has not only made progress toward the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in respect of education, it has also turned itself into "the world's largest classroom". Of the country's 28,384,132 inhabitants, more than 10 million, or 37 per cent of the total population, are currently enrolled in educational programmes of one kind or another at the various levels of the education system.

The progress achieved in the field of education during the Bolivarian Revolution has been manifest: (a) 1,706,145 men and women have learned to read and write, with the result that the literacy rate is now 98.55 per cent; (b) school enrolment has increased by 24 per cent since 1999; (c) the net preschool enrolment rate has nearly doubled, from 53 per cent in the 1998-99 school year to 71 per cent in 2009-10; (d) the net primary school enrolment rate increased by seven percentage points between 1998 and 2010, reaching 93 per cent in the 2009-10 school year; (e) the numbers of pupils beginning Grade 1 and continuing through to the final grade of primary school increased by 18 percentage points over a period of six years, reaching 35 per cent in the 2009-10 school year; (f) the net intermediate school enrolment rate was 72 per cent in 2009-10, a 24 per cent increase compared to 1998-99; (g) at the intermediate level, enrolment in science and the humanities rose by 98 per cent during the Bolivarian Revolution, while the corresponding increase for technical training programmes was 76 per cent; (h) enrolment in special education increased by 257 per cent between 1998-99 and 2009-10; (i) indigenous people have been integrated into the education system, which recognizes and respects their cultures (at the present time, 110,851 indigenous persons are enrolled in the system, attending schools some of which are within indigenous areas and others elsewhere); (j) university enrolment increased by 192 per cent between 1998 and 2010: in the former year there were 735,285 students attending universities, while by 2010 the total had increased to 2,293,914; and (k) in 2010, 70.3 per cent of all students attending university were enrolled at State-run institutions, while 29.7 per cent were enrolled at private institutions. This situation indicates a reversal of the former trend toward the privatization of higher education.

In addition, the Bolivarian Revolution has a number of other significant achievements to its credit in the field of education, including the proclamation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela as an illiteracy-free territory and the fact that the country has been recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as ranking fifth world-wide, and second in Latin America and the Caribbean, in terms of its gross university enrolment rate.

Not only have strategies been introduced into the formal education system, but cultural management has been consolidated throughout the country, which is advancing toward the democratization of culture and the integration of population groups that have traditionally been excluded from the cultural sphere.

In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, education is the main strategic factor in the task of upgrading social welfare as well as the key to promoting full social participation by both women and men, without discrimination of any kind, and equality in gender relations. Under the Constitution, gender has no effect on an individual's status before the law (article 21), and equality between men and women is a recurrent theme throughout. Furthermore, the educational traditions of indigenous peoples are recognized and respected through the institution of a system of bilingual intercultural education.

The Constitution states that education is a public service, and that it is pluralistic and grounded in respect for all lines of universal thought. The purpose of education is to promote the full development of the student's personality for the greater enjoyment of a life of dignity sustained by an awareness of the ethical value of work and active participation by human beings in all processes of social change, on a basis of solidarity.

To these ends, the Venezuelan State has instituted an ongoing, incremental social investment process designed to ensure that education is available for all and compulsory from the preschool level to the intermediate and diversified levels. It is also free up to the undergraduate level. Education has thus become a foundation-stone for the purposes of the State, in accordance with the recommendations of UNESCO.

The development of public policy in the field of education has brought about far-reaching changes in the ways knowledge is accessed, constructed, produced, transmitted, distributed and used. This is particularly true of university education, which has been reinstituted as a humanistic endeavour serving to guide the integral training of human talents within a transforming, participatory and inclusive process characterized by constantly critical thought.

These achievements are owing primarily to the policy of abolishing registration fees at all State-run educational establishments, the implementation of the school meals programme (from which 4,055,135 pupils benefited in 2010, up from 119,512 in 1998, for an increase of 3,293 per cent), the introduction of educational missions (Robinson I, Robinson II, Alma Mater and Sucre), the building of 4,037 new State schools, a 161 per cent increase in the number of teachers, and the strategies that have been successfully designed and implemented at all levels and modalities of education.

Particularly significant among these strategies have been the introduction of the Simoncito programme in preprimary education, the Bolivarian Schools at the primary level, and the Bolivarian Secondary Schools and Robinsonian Technical Schools at the intermediate level. Another aspect that should be emphasized has been the integration of information and communication technology as a feature of curriculum development in primary education.

Noteworthy innovations in the university education subsystem have been municipalization and the launching of the Robinson I, Robinson II and Ribas educational missions, the aim of which is to resolve the issue of school exclusion in

primary, intermediate and diversified education, and the Sucre and Alma Mater missions, which are strategies for the universalization of university education through municipalization. This consists of a public policy aimed at offsetting regional disparities by bringing education into communities.

In 2010, six university institutes of technology were converted into the first six regional polytechnic universities. Five universities were established in Venezuela between 1989 and 1998, while between 1999 and 2010, the Revolution has established 25 official institutions of university-level education. Nineteen of these are national experimental universities, while the other six are conventional universities.

The establishment of specialized universities has been particularly noteworthy. These include the Experimental University of the Arts, the National Experimental University of Security, the Bolivarian Military University of Venezuela, the Venezuelan University of Hydrocarbons, the Jesús Rivero Bolivarian Workers' University, and the Sports University of the South. The establishment of the Paulo Freire Latin American Institute for Agroecology and the Mayor (AV) Miguel Rodríguez University Institute of Civil Aviation have been other significant achievements. In addition, 32 national training programmes have been organized, and two indigenous universities have been founded.

Venezuela's international cooperation is predicated on the effort to build a multipolar world, with a fundamental concern to promote a Latin American and Caribbean union and the establishment of strategic political, economic and cultural alliances with a view to fostering the proliferation of new power groupings and thereby contributing to the advent of a new global geopolitical configuration.

Education has been viewed as a strategic factor for cooperation on a basis of solidarity and unity among peoples. Accordingly, interinstitutional relations and international mobility for students and instructors have been encouraged and joint training and research projects developed. International cooperation initiatives have included the Cuba-Venezuela Convention, the International Robinson Mission, the Grand National ALBA Education Project, the cooperation agreement between the People's Republic of China and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the international scholarships programme, university degree recognition agreements, and cooperation with Africa.

The strategic priority informing Venezuela's international cooperation effort in the field of education is relations with Latin America and the Caribbean, both bilateral and multilateral. In addition, priority is given to South-South relations with Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

As will be clear from the foregoing discussion, Venezuela can reasonably be said to have become "the world's largest classroom".

I. Introduction

After 11 years of the revolution initiated by the advent of the Bolivarian Government in 1999, Venezuela has not only made significant progress toward the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, it has also turned itself into the "world's largest classroom". Of the country's 28,384,132 inhabitants, 10,384,132, or 37.46 per cent of the total population, are currently enrolled in educational programmes of one kind or another at the various levels of the education system.

A breakdown of these figures shows that in 2010, 1,563,117 children were enrolled in preschool institutions, 3,428,351 children were enrolled in primary schools, 2,254,935 adolescents were enrolled in intermediate schools, and 207,265 children were enrolled in special education classes. In addition, 110,851 children were enrolled in the bilingual intercultural education system and 2,293,914 students were attending universities. In the field of adult education, 14,829 students enrolled in the context of the first Robinson Mission (Robinson I), 297,833 in the context of Robinson II, and 462,251 in the context of the Ribas Mission[1].

In Venezuela, education "is a human right and a fundamental social duty" enshrined in article 102 of the Constitution, which was approved by the will of the people through the participatory, democratic process of a national referendum held on 15 December 1999. With this new conception of education as a basis, the main objective of State policy in the field of education has been to make it universally available through the social integration of every individual living in Venezuela.

Article 102 goes on to state that education "is democratic, free of charge and compulsory. The State assumes responsibility for it as an imperative function that is of the utmost importance, at all levels and in all modes, as an instrument of scientific, humanistic and technological knowledge in the service of society." Accordingly, education has been the target of a social investment process on a priority basis.

In accordance with our basic law, then, education is a public service, one that is pluralistic and grounded in respect for all lines of universal thought. The purpose of education is to promote the full development of the student's personality for the greater enjoyment of a life of dignity sustained by an awareness of the ethical value of work and active participation by human beings in all processes of social change, on a basis of solidarity and in a Latin American, Caribbean and universal perspective. Accordingly, education is integral, of high quality, and permanent, and is accessible all on a footing of equality to all, including in particular persons with disabilities, indigenous persons, women, migrants, persons in detention and members of other vulnerable groups.

To these ends, the Venezuelan State has instituted an ongoing, incremental social investment process designed to ensure that education is available for all and compulsory from the preschool level to the intermediate and diversified levels. It is also free up to the undergraduate level. Education has thus become a foundation-

[1] Gender equity is enshrined in the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The concept is expressed throughout the text by the use of the feminine forms of words in accordance with a principle of equality and non-discrimination as set forth in article 21. In view of the length of this report, however, for strictly methodological reasons and in accordance with Economic and Social Council guidelines, the feminine gender is not distinguished herein.

stone for the purposes of the State, in accordance with the recommendations of UNESCO.

In 11 years, the Bolivarian Revolution has unquestionably realized substantial achievements in the field of education. The following are particularly noteworthy: (a) 1,706,145 men and women have learned to read and write; (b) the net preschool enrolment rate increased by 28 per cent between 1999 and 2010, with 1,400,000 children currently in the system; (c) over the same period, the net primary school enrolment rate increased by 7 per cent; (d) the intermediate school enrolment rate increased by 24 per cent, and (e) university enrolment has grown by 192 per cent in the course of the past decade.

These achievements have been realized owing primarily to the implementation of a series of public policies, including in particular the abolition of registration fees at all State-run educational establishments throughout the country, the implementation of the school meals programme, and the introduction of educational missions[2]. The purpose of the missions designated Robinson I, Robinson II and Ribas is to resolve the issue of school exclusion in primary, intermediate and diversified education, while the missions designated Sucre and Alma Mater are strategies for the universalization of university education through municipalization. This consists of a public policy aimed at offsetting regional disparities by bringing education into communities.

The development of public policy in the field of education has brought about far-reaching changes in the ways knowledge is accessed, constructed, produced, transmitted, distributed and used. This is particularly true of university education, which has been reinstituted as a humanistic endeavour serving to guide the integral training of human talents within a transforming, participatory and inclusive process characterized by constantly critical thought.

This voluntary national presentation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the Economic and Social Council on the implementation of internationally agreed goals and commitments on education outlines the Government's successful effort to turn the country into "the world's largest classroom". It also provides an overview of the new concept of education, achievements to date, the strategies and good practices that have been implemented, and international cooperation. Challenges that remain to be overcome as Venezuela's educational revolution is strengthened and consolidated are summarized in the last part of this report.

We may note at this point that the work of preparing and drafting this national report was characterized by extensive participation and interaction, with input not only from educational institutions but also from the National Institute of Statistics under the coordination of the Ministry of the People's Power for Foreign Relations. In addition, six workshops were organized for that purpose, including a final national presentation workshop at which the draft report was discussed.

[2] These educational missions are a component of the social missions that have been implemented by the Bolivarian Government since 2003. Social missions are large-scale strategies designed to safeguard people's fundamental rights, with emphasis on marginalized population groups. These initiatives receive significant financial support, and are characterized by interinstitutional and interministerial coordination. A central feature of all of them is that the target communities must play an active leadership role in their planning and implementation and subsequent follow-up measures. Their essential purpose is to confront the causes and consequences of poverty and exclusion, with the active participation of the people concerned.

The workshops were attended by various officials, including senior personnel from the Ministry of the People's Power for Foreign Relations, the Ministry of the People's Power for Education, the Ministry of the People's Power for University Education, the Ministry of the People's Power for Indigenous Peoples, and the Ministry of the People's Power for Planning and Finance, teachers, students, children and young people of both sexes, the various United Nations agencies accredited to Venezuela, national specialists in education, directors and beneficiaries of educational missions, and the independent national expert. As a contribution by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the task of making productive use of voluntary national presentations, a systematic account of the methodology developed during the preparation and drafting of this report and the procedures and results of all the workshops are appended hereto in the Annex.

II. Education in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

A. Principles governing education in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, education is a fundamental human right. In 1999, the Venezuelan people, exercising its sovereign powers through a national referendum, approved the Constitution now in force with the ultimate aim of reconfiguring the Republic to establish a multiethnic, multicultural, democratic, participatory and proactive society in a decentralized federal State based on justice, one that would consolidate the values of freedom, independence, peace, solidarity, the common good, territorial integrity, coexistence and the rule of law for the present and future generations.

Article 102 of the Constitution states, "Education is a human right and a fundamental social duty; it is democratic, free of charge and compulsory. The State assumes responsibility for it as an imperative function that is of the utmost importance, at all levels and in all modes, as an instrument of scientific, humanistic and technological knowledge in the service of society."

In Venezuela, education is deemed to be a public service. Under no circumstances is it regarded as a private commodity subject to market laws of supply and demand, and as such the result of commercial transactions depending on individuals' ability to pay.

Another innovation showing how far the new Constitution represents an improvement on its 1961 predecessor is its recognition of education as something that continues throughout life: on the one hand, education is now compulsory from the preschool (kindergarten) level through the intermediate level, and on the other hand, it is free from preschool to university at State institutions.

In Venezuela, education is liberating in that its essential function is to prepare new individuals for active participation, with full awareness and solidarity, in individual and social transformation processes.

The distinctive education of indigenous peoples is recognized in article 113 of the Constitution through the institution of a system of bilingual intercultural education that combines formal education with traditional indigenous approaches and features the use of indigenous languages as well as Spanish.

Education in Venezuela is also a social investment, and as such fosters full participation by and integration of the most vulnerable population groups, including indigenous people, Afro-Venezuelans, children with special educational needs, and persons with disabilities. Moreover, education is the main strategic factor in the task of upgrading social welfare as well as the key to promoting full social participation by both women and men and equality in gender relations. Under the Constitution, gender has no effect on an individual's status before the law (article 21), and equality between men and women is a recurrent theme throughout.

Venezuela's standard-setting statutes with a bearing on gender issues include the Organic Law on Women's Right to a Life Free from Violence and the Law on the Protection and Promotion of Breastfeeding, which provides that "fathers and other family members shall provide all necessary support and encouragement to enable mothers to exercise this human right for the benefit of their sons and daughters." The Bolivarian Republic has a mechanism for the integral protection of maternity and paternity, regardless of the civil status of the mother or father, and access to a full range of family planning services based on ethical and scientific values, including the educational aspect in particular; this mechanism consists of a decree, namely resolution 1762 issued by the Ministry of the People's Power for Education on 9 October 1996, which provides that pregnant girls attending school are entitled to protection. Under article 2 of the decree, "No pupil shall be denied access to or expelled from an educational establishment on the grounds of previous failure, pregnancy, conduct or discipline, religion, parents' civil status, absence of a uniform, non-possession of school supplies, or any other grounds not established by law."

As a means of supplementing the provisions of article 103 of the Constitution, the Venezuelan State has instituted an ongoing social investment process designed to ensure that education is available for all and compulsory from the preschool level to the intermediate and diversified levels. It is also free up to the undergraduate level. Education has thus become a foundation-stone for the purposes of the State, in accordance with the recommendations of the United Nations.

B. Education in the framework of the Simón Bolívar National Project

The Simón Bolívar National Project includes education as one of its fundamental components, laying down policies, strategies and projects aimed at "overcoming poverty and integrating all persons in a situation of extreme poverty and maximal social exclusion." The project includes a policy of ensuring that education becomes deeply rooted in society and is accessible to all, and to that end it formulates a number of strategies aimed at:

(a) Ensuring that all school-age children are enrolled in school, with emphasis on marginalized social groups;

(b) Ensuring that pupils remain in school and pursue their education;

(c) Strengthening environmental education, cultural identity, health promotion and community participation;

(d) Upgrading infrastructure and provide schools with academic and sports facilities;

(e) Ensuring that the education system conforms to the socialist production model;

(f) Strengthening and encouraging research on the educational process;

(g) Developing bilingual intercultural education;

(h) Ensuring access to knowledge in order to make relevant higher education available to all.

This policy has been the basis for designing specific programmes and projects which have enabled the Government of Venezuela to progress in its task of building the socialism of the twenty-first century, the ultimate goal of which is "supreme social happiness".

C. The Organic Law on Education

A new Organic Law on Education was promulgated on 15 August 2009. Under article 2 of the Law, "Education is public, social, free, of high quality, secular, integral, permanent, socially relevant, creative, artistic, innovative, critical, multicultural, multiethnic, intercultural, and multilingual."

The Organic Law on Education defines the aims of education as follows: (a) to develop each human being's creative potential for the full exercise of his or her personality and citizenship; (b) to develop a new political culture grounded in proactive participation and action to strengthen the power of the people; (c) to develop individuals on the basis of a geohistorical approach aimed at instilling awareness of their nationality and sovereignty; (d) to promote respect for human dignity and training informed by the ethical values of tolerance, justice, solidarity, peace, respect for human rights and non-discrimination; (e) to encourage the growth of ecological awareness with a view to preserving biodiversity and social diversity; and (f) to educate pupils in, by and through liberating social work from an integral standpoint.

D. Organization of the education system

The education system of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is defined in article 24 of the Law as "an organic, structured entity comprising a number of subsystems, levels and modalities corresponding to the successive stages in human development." It is organized into a number of educational subsystems, all of them closely interrelated, and each of them given material expression in the form of State-run and private institutions. It is systematic, flexible and integral in nature, and it ensures equal opportunity and equal conditions by integrating all pupils within its several subsystems, with attention to multiethnic, intercultural and multicultural diversity and to special education needs. Its focus is the humanistic, social, environmental, participatory, proactive and collectively responsible human being. It is divided into two subsystems, the basic education subsystem and the university education subsystem.

The basic education subsystem

This subsystem is organized into different educational levels: preschool, primary and intermediate. The preschool level comprises the kindergarten and preprimary levels, which are for children between 0 and six years of age. The primary level comprises six grades and leads to the primary education certificate. The intermediate level is divided into two options: general intermediate education, which is a five-year programme, and technical intermediate education, which comprises six grades.

The basic education subsystem is also organized into modalities, which are defined in article 26 of the Organic Law on Education as "variant forms of education aimed at persons who, because of their characteristics and the specific conditions of their integral development, including cultural, ethnic, linguistic and other aspects, require, permanently or temporarily, an adapted curriculum suited to the needs of the several educational levels. Modalities include special education, youth and adult education, frontier education, rural education, art education, military education, intercultural education and bilingual intercultural education."

In the 2009-10 school year, there were 28,692 schools in the basic education subsystem in the country as a whole. Of these, 82.67 per cent (23,719 schools) were State-run, while 17.33 per cent (4,973 schools) were privately run.

A total of 7,735,815 students were enrolled in the basic education subsystem in 2009-10, including 6,078,510 who were enrolled in State-run schools and 1,657,305 who were enrolled in private schools. A breakdown by educational level and modality shows that there were 1,563,117 children in preschool education, 3,428,351 in primary education, 2,254,935 in intermediate education, 282,147 in youth and adult education, and 207,265 in special education[3].

The university education subsystem

The university education subsystem is divided into undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and it, too, features State-run and private institutions. This subsystem comprises experimental and non-experimental universities, autonomous universities, and university institutes and colleges.

A total of 2,293,914 students were enrolled at Venezuelan universities in 2010, including 2,184,327 undergraduates and 109,587 graduate students[4]. Most of these (1,611,497, or 70.3 per cent) were enrolled at State-run institutions, while the remaining 681,967 (29.7 per cent) were enrolled at private institutions.

III. Achievements and strategies in the field of education

The progress achieved in the field of education since the beginning of the Bolivarian Revolution has been manifest for all subsystems, levels and modalities. In the course of the past 11 years, Venezuela has turned itself into "the world's largest classroom", advancing toward universal education through increased enrolment, better school performance, and declining dropout rates.

[3] These figures do not include enrolment in the context of Bolivarian missions, which will be found in subsequent section of this report.

[4] The enrolment figures include enrolment in the context of the Sucre mission.

These achievements have been realized owing in part to the fact that specific policies and strategies have been designed and implemented at all levels and modalities of the country's education subsystems.

Furthermore, in addition to the strategies that have been implemented in the formal education system, policies aimed at the social integration of individuals across the entire culture have been developed. The Bolivarian Revolution has consolidated cultural management throughout the country, developing a new infrastructure and new plans and programmes which stand in striking contrast to the management that characterized the previous decade.

Venezuela's achievements to date in all levels and modalities of the basic education system, the university education subsystem and the cultural sphere, and also the strategies that have enabled the country to turn itself into "the world's largest classroom" will be described in detail in the following pages.

A. Achievement and strategies in basic education

Under the Bolivarian Revolution, 1,502,688 children and adolescents have been integrated into the various levels of the basic education system. Between the 1998-99 and 2009-10 school years, school enrolment increased by 24 per cent, in contrast to the preceding decade: between the 1988-89 and 1997-98 school years, enrolment grew by only 10 per cent.

One strategy adopted by the Bolivarian Government to promote universal school enrolment at every level has been the abolition of registration fees at all State-run schools, including preschool, primary and intermediate institutions. This measure was adopted as a means of reversing the attempted privatization of education that was quite clearly under way before 1999.

Another important measure adopted by the Bolivarian Government has been the strenthening of the school meals programme. This programme has contributed significantly to the lower incidence of child malnutrition and the increased school enrolment, lower dropout and better performance rates that have been observable at all levels of the basic education system since 1999.

Correct nutrition is a fundamental strategic factor for school children, one that is critical to their integral development as human beings at every stage in their lives, and consequently it has a decisive positive impact on their physical development, growth and learning, and is reflected in lower repetition and dropout rates. Accordingly, the Bolivarian Government has expended and strengthened the school meals programme, which is designed for the benefit of children, adolescents and young people enrolled at State-run schools. Its objective is to ensure that their diet is varied, balanced, of high quality and suited to the nutritional, caloric and energy requirements of every age group. The programme also has an impact on family group dynamics, not only in the economic sphere but also in the matter of eating habits.

A total of 4,055,135 pupils benefited from the school meals programme in 2010, up from 119,512 in 1998, for an increase of 3,293 per cent in the course of the 11 years that have passed since the beginning of the Bolivarian Revolution.

Yet another measure that has had an impact at all levels of the basic education subsystem has been the introduction of preferential student bus tickets, a social

instrument designed to ensure that students can afford to use the public transport system by giving them reduced fares. All students attending State-run and private institutions, including universities, are eligible for these tickets.

One feature of the strategies that have been implemented in the basic education system has been the construction of 4,037 new State-run schools between 1998-99 and 2009-10, a figure that represents a 21 per cent increase in the country's stock of school buildings. Over the same period, there was only a 13 per cent increase in new school construction.

Numbers of teachers have increased by 161 per cent during the Bolivarian Revolution, with 494,534 teachers in 2009-2010, up from 189,172 in 1998. During the preceding period, in contrast, there was a 19 per cent decline in the numbers of Venezuelan teachers.

Preschool education

During the Bolivarian Revolution, the net preschool enrolment ratio has increased by 28 percentage points, from 43 per cent in the 1998-99 school year to 71 per cent in the 2009-2010 school year. During the preceding period, from 1988-89 to 1998-99, that ratio increased by only six percentage points, from 38 per cent to 43 per cent.

The net preschool enrolment ratio thus grew five times as fast as the corresponding figure for the preceding period. This achievement was due, first, to the Constitution's recognition of preschool education as the first compulsory level, second, to the abolition of registration fees at State-run institutions at that level, third, to the strengthening of the school meals programme, and finally, to the adoption of specific strategies at that level, including in particular the design and implementation of Project Simoncito. This is a project aimed at ensuring that all children between 0 and six years of age enjoy social, educational and dietary conditions that will enable them to grow, develop fully and advance to the primary education stage under conditions of equal opportunity.

Early in 1999, there were 11,546 preschool institutions; today, 11 years later, and following the introduction of Project Simoncito, there are 16,972 such institutions.

Primary education

At the primary education level, Venezuela has made progress toward the Millennium Development Goals in the field of education. The positive trend in the direction of universal primary education is observable from the net enrolment ratio, which is an indicator of Millennium Goal 2.

In the 2009-10 school year, the net primary-school enrolment ratio was 93 per cent. That is to say, out of every 100 children between 6 and 11 years of age who should have been attending school, 93 actually were doing so. This represents a 7 per cent increase over the 1998-99 school year, when the Bolivarian Revolution began.

This upward trend in the net primary-school enrolment ratio stands in contrast to the trend observed during the preceding period, when the ratio declined by 4 per cent, on average, from 90 per cent in the 1990-91 school year to 86 per cent in 1998-99.

As regards the second indicator for Millennium Goal 2, percentage of students who begin Grade 1 and reach the final grade of primary school in six years, it appears that during the period extending between the 2004-05 and 2009-10 school years (i.e. during the Bolivarian Revolution), 85 per cent of all pupils completed primary school in six years. However, taking the repetition factor into account, we find that over 97 per cent of all pupils completed primary school in six to eight years.

A comparison of this figure with the corresponding figure for the period before 1999, between the 1993-94 and 1998-99 school years, reveals that only 67 per cent of all pupils who began primary school completed it in six years.

During the Bolivarian Revolution, then, there has been an 18 per cent increase in the number of pupils who begin Grade 1 and continue to the final grade of primary school in six years, whereas the corresponding increase during the preceding period was a mere 1 per cent.

As we have seen, the increases observed for the net primary-school enrolment ratio and numbers of students beginning Grade 1 and completing primary school in six years show that Venezuela has made progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Another accomplishment that deserves notice is the behaviour of completion and dropout rates for that level.

For the 2008-2009 school year, the completion rate for primary education was 95 per cent. During the 1990s, the average value of this indicator was 85 per cent, while during the Bolivarian Revolution it has been 92 per cent, a figure that represents a 7 per cent increase.

The school dropout rate for the primary level averaged 2 per cent between 1998-99 and 2009-10, compared to 5 per cent in the previous decade. That is, there has been a 3 per cent decline from the former period to the latter.

These achievements have been realized partly owing to the above-mentioned education strategies, and partly to the introduction of Bolivarian schools and the integration of information and communication technology as a means of strengthening pupils' learning capacity.

The Bolivarian schools have been designed as a space for action to combat educational exclusion. They are characterized by all-day operation, so that children can spend the entire day at the school; this is a means of addressing a number of external factors that contribute to exclusion, such as poor nutrition and extreme poverty. At Bolivarian schools, children enjoy enhanced social protection services, including transport, meals, medical assistance, uniforms, scholarships, shoes, and educational and vocational guidance.

During the Bolivarian Revolution, 5,749 Bolivarian schools have been established as of the 2009-10 school year. Of these, 5,495 are primary schools, while 254 provide special education.

The Canaima educational project is a transforming experiment in curriculum development in Venezuela. Its aim is to support integral training for pupils by means of portable school computers with digitized educational content for teachers and pupils at the primary level. Canaimas are used in State-run schools throughout the country, and also at private schools that are subsidized by the State.

The project is being executed in the framework of the cooperation agreement between the Republic of Portugal and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. It comprises two components: (a) "Canaima at school", with the portable computers being kept at the school, and (b) "Taking Canaima home with me", with every primary-school pupil from Grade 2 through Grade 6 having a portable school computer, with educational content appropriate to his or her grade, at his or her disposal at all times.

The project was launched in 2009, and between that time and 2010, 382,708 Grade 1 and Grade 2 primary-level pupils at 11,432 schools have been supplied with portable computers; as of April 2011, a total of 743,887 computers had been made available. The goal for 2012 is to ensure that portable school computers are made available to the entire primary-level student population attending State-run schools and also private schools that are subsidized by the State.

Literacy is another of the Bolivarian Revolution's major achievements. Literacy rates for men and women between 15 and 24 years of age increased from 97.59 per cent in 1999 to 98.55 per cent in 2009.

The increase in the literacy rate is due to the success of the first Robinson Mission (Robinson I), which was launched in 2003 as a means of paying off the country's social debt in the area of education with which the Bolivarian Revolution was confronted at its inception, while also reducing the currently high social exclusion rates. The project has continued to this day, and as of 2010, 1,706,145 Venezuelans have learned to read and write. At the present time, 14,829 people are enrolled in the context of Robinson I.

The aim of Robinson I was the eradication of illiteracy. It was implemented with the support of the Republic of Cuba in the form of consultancy services and its "Yes I can" literacy method, which won a UNESCO literacy prize. The mission, which is the largest mass literacy programme organized in recent years, has developed in various settings in communities, including public schools, community facilities and public buildings.

The second Robinson mission (Robinson II) was launched in 2003 as a means of ensuring that pupils continued to Grade 6, including not only graduates from Robinson I, but all persons who had dropped out of formal education for any reason. Phase II of the Robinson mission is based on the "Yes I can continue" method[5].

In the framework of Robinson II, 577,483 Venezuelans had reached Grade 6 as of 2010. In that year, 297,833 individuals enrolled under the mission with a view to completing their primary education.

Some other achievements of these missions are outlined in the following paragraphs:

(a) The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela declared an illiteracy-free territory: on 28 October 2005, the Director-General of UNESCO sent a letter to the Minister of Education declaring Venezuela to be an illiteracy-free territory;

(b) Literacy training for indigenous peoples: as of 2010, a total of 68,495 individuals from a variety of ethnic groups, including the Kariña, Wuayúu, Piaroa, Yanomami, Guarao, Piapoco, Guarequena, Bari, Arauco, Pemón, Maquiritare,

[5] This method uses television, video classes and support brochures as its educational strategy.

Yucpa, Pume, Ye'Kwana and Jivi peoples, had learned to read and write. Of those individuals, 55 per cent were women and 45 per cent men. Furthermore, the educational materials of the "Yes I can" method had been translated into the Jivi, Ye'kwana, Kariña and Warao languages. At the present time, 32,880 indigenous persons are enrolled in the context of Robinson I;

(c) Inclusion of the prison population: the extension of the Robinson I and II missions to prisons has made it feasible to integrate the prison population into the Venezuelan education system, thereby enabling detainees to learn to read and write and continue to Grade 6 of the primary level, while the Ribas and Sucre missions perform the same function for the intermediate level and the university level respectively. As of 2010, 992 prison inmates have participated in Robinsons I and II, and at the present time, 2,050 inmates are pursuing their education at all levels;

(d) Integration of the population with special educational needs: the programme takes into account the special educational needs of persons with visual, motor, hearing-related and other disabilities who have been excluded from the education system. To that end, a number of tools requiring personalized attention have been developed to supplement the literacy process, notably sign language and the Braille system. For example, the "Yes I can" educational materials have been translated into Braille, along with various textbooks expressly designed for the special-needs population.

In this connection, 7,154 persons with hearing, visual, motor and cognitive disabilities had been integrated into the education system by 2010. In addition, persons with Down's syndrome and other learning difficulties have been taught to read and write in the context of the Robinson mission: programme contents are adapted to take each individual's specific needs into account, personalized attention is provided, and appropriate educational materials are used.

Intermediate education

For the 2009-10 school year, the net intermediate-level enrolment ratio was 72 per cent, a figure that represents a 24 per cent increase over the 48 per cent observed for the 1998-99 school year. During the decade preceding the Bolivarian Revolution, that ratio had increased by a mere 3 per cent, from 45 per cent to 48 per cent in 1998-99.

Dropout rates have been characterized by a downward trend during the Bolivarian Revolution, averaging 10 per cent since 1999, whereas the corresponding figure for the preceding decade was 17 per cent. A comparison of the two periods thus shows a 7 per cent reduction. For the 2008-2009 school year, the dropout rate for the intermediate level was 9 per cent.

Further evidence of Venezuela's transformation into "the world's largest classroom" may been seen in the increase in enrolment at the intermediate education level, including both the field of science and humanities and the field of technical training. For the former, enrolment increased from 322,075 students during the 1997-98 school year to 654,553 in the 2009-10 school year, for a gain of 98 per cent.

The corresponding figure for technical training was 76 per cent: total enrolment in this field was 122,027 in the 2009-2010 school year, up from 66,881 in 1997-98.

One particularly noteworthy strategy that has been implemented specifically at this educational level has been the establishment of Bolivarian secondary schools[6]. The objective of these schools is to ensure that students are prepared for the production system with a view to meeting human needs. To that end, sustainable, productive educational projects with socio-cultural relevance are designed and carried out. In the 2009-10 school year, there were a total of 1,549 Bolivarian secondary schools located throughout the country, with 667,087 students.

The new concept of education has been translated into practice through the Robinsonian technical schools project. In these schools, education and work are treated as processes that are fundamental to the task of maintaining and developing individuals and ensuring respect for human dignity. In 1998, when the Bolivarian Revolution began, Venezuela had 103 technical schools; by the 2009-10 school year, the total had grown to 340, for an increase of 230 per cent over that period. Two hundred and twenty-six of the country's technical schools, i.e. 67 per cent of the total, are Robinsonian schools.

Another strategy that has been implemented at this level has been the Ribas mission[7], which was launched in 2003. Its objective is to provide access to intermediate education for persons who never had an opportunity to complete the intermediate grades, or persons who were never able to enter intermediate school at all. The Ribas mission has enabled 632,623 Venezuelans to complete their intermediate education since 2005. At the present time, for the country as a whole, 462,251 students are enrolled, all of whom will obtain intermediate-school leaving certificates within two years.

Intercultural and bilingual intercultural education

The Bolivarian Revolution has introduced a number of different modalities in education, and one of these, bilingual intercultural education, represents significant progress in the development of the educational traditions of indigenous peoples and the strengthening and reinvigoration of their languages and cultures through education. The aim of this modality is to make education available for all in the context of a multiethnic, multicultural society, with recognition of cultural diversity.

One of the great achievements of the Bolivarian Revolution is that it has made room for the indigenous peoples, who had been excluded for over 200 years. Their right to be consulted has now been recognized in the Constitution, and they have been given a voice and enjoy full participation.

Some particularly significant innovations have been that indigenous languages must now be used at all public and private schools located in indigenous areas, including urban areas inhabited by indigenous people, the construction and rehabilitation of indigenous schools, which have been made ecologically, culturally and linguistically relevant, the production and publication of educational materials, both printed and audio-visual, in indigenous languages and in bilingual editions, and initial and continuing training for indigenous teachers.

In the 2009-10 school year, there were 656 indigenous schools, providing preschool, primary and intermediate education, within the geographic areas

[6] This term designates secondary schools that provide intermediate-level education.

[7] This mission features innovative distance teaching methods and is supported by facilitators, community organizations and official institutions.

inhabited by indigenous peoples in the States of Amazonas, Anzoátegui, Apure, Bolívar, Delta Amacuro, Mérida, Monagas, Sucre and Zulia. Total enrolment amounted to 68,520 indigenous children in that school year.

Outside geographic areas inhabited by indigenous peoples, 42,331 indigenous children are enrolled at 604 schools nation-wide. In all, 110,851 indigenous children are currently enrolled in the basic education subsystem.

Special education

The special education modality serves the population with special educational needs, from young children to adults. It also promotes the integration of special needs persons into other modalities of the education system at various levels. In the 2009-10 school year, a total of 207,265 children, adolescents and adults with various disabilities, including autism, hearing impairment, visual impairment, learning difficulties, physical handicaps, mental retardation and speech disorders were enrolled in special education schools and services.

The Bolivarian Revolution has made provision for all persons with special needs. Between the 1998-99 and 2009-10 school years, special education enrolment increased by 257 per cent, from 67,883 persons to 207,265.

In 2010, Venezuela has 956 special education institutes and educational units and 3,130 integrated classrooms. Integrated classrooms are located in regular schools, to serve pupils with any type of special educational needs. To that end, the special education teacher and the regular class teacher work as a team.

B. Achievements and strategies in university education

In 2003, a nation-wide debate involving all stakeholders in the university sector began in Venezuela. That debate centred on the epistemological, organizational and instructional models currently in use in the country's universities and the proposed new transformative options which were initially put into practice with the establishment of the Bolivarian University of Venezuela.

Not only has this process yielded significant contributions in the area of the legal and conceptual aspects of university life, it has also facilitated the establishment of an agenda for the transformation of the university subsystem, in accordance with the National Development Plan (2007-2013) and consistent with the results of international and regional conferences on the issue. The agenda in question includes social relevance, equity, quality and innovation, responsible autonomy, active, participatory internal democracy, the exercise of critical thinking, integral training, humanistic and ethical education, and lifelong education.

During the Bolivarian Revolution, significant progress has been made in the effort to encourage secondary-school graduates to go on to university. By 2010, it was clear that that effort had been successful, with 128,382 applicants having been admitted through the National Single University Education Registration System. Of those applicants, 1,217 are persons with disabilities and 2,702 are indigenous persons. Moreover, 2,335 of them are Ribas Mission graduates. It is also noteworthy that 52.4 per cent of these university places (67,323) have been assigned to high-school graduates from lower socioeconomic social strata. Here we see

evidence of a substantial gain in the process of integrating persons who have historically been marginalized.

In 2010, total university enrolment was 76 per 1,000 population, while the weighted average for the 12 years of the Revolution is 50 per 1,000 population. This is double the corresponding figure for the preceding decade, in which total university enrolment was 27 per 1,000 population.

Between 1998 and 2010, university enrolment grew by 192 per cent. In 1990, there were 537,698 students attending university, in 1998 there were 785,285, but by 2010 the total had grown to 2,293,914.

Of all university students in 2010, 70.3 per cent were attending State-run institutions, while 29.7 per cent were attending private institutions. There has thus been a substantial increase in enrolment at State universities during the period of the Bolivarian Revolution.

One of the Revolution's noteworthy achievements in the field of university education has been the recognition of Venezuela by UNESCO as the fifth-ranking country in the world, and the second-ranking country in Latin America and the Caribbean, in terms of its gross university enrolment rate, which is 85 per cent.

These achievements in the field of university education are due to the design and implementation of a number of strategies, including in particular the establishment of the Ministry of the People's Power for University Education, the municipalization of education at that level, and the Sucre and Alma Mater missions.

Establishment of the Ministry of the People's Power for University Education

The Bolivarian Revolution is characterized by an understanding of the strategic importance of university education for the social, political, economic and cultural transformation of the nation. In this framework, the Ministry of the People's Power for Higher Education was established on 8 January 2002. Upon the adoption of the Organic Law on Education in 2009, the Ministry was renamed the Ministry of the People's Power for University Education.

The municipalization of university education

Municipalization has been one of the fundamental guidelines and key strategies of the universal higher education policy adopted by the Bolivarian Revolution.

One aim of municipalization is to bring the university to the places where people live, in order to open its doors to all, regardless of age, family obligations, economic situation, or employment status. The university has been brought into communities so that it can be accessible to people who work, people who are have children to care for, people who are unable to travel far from home, and people who do not live in major urban areas.

In the framework of that strategy, the Sucre Mission was launched in 2003 with the objective of bringing university education to every municipality in the country on the basis of the needs and potential of the various regions, creating educational spaces to enable students to enrol in the various training programmes managed by universities.

Thanks to these municipal educational spaces, which are known as "university villages", university enrolment has increased from 785,285 students in 1998 to 2,293,914 in 2010.

In 2010, the Sucre Mission resulted in 462,199 students' taking university education, including 57,532 with scholarships and 10,047 of indigenous origin.

The difference in the geographic extension of university education before and since the Sucre Mission is striking. In 1998, access to education at that level was available only in large capital cities and in the north central coastal region; by 2010, it had become available throughout the country.

In 2010, a total of 57,023 students nation-wide obtained financial assistance through the Sucre Mission, including (a) 34,230 who received funding under national training programmes, (b) 14,319 who were enrolled in the first four years of the Integral Community Medicine Programme, and (c) 8,474 who were enrolled in the fifth year of that programme.

In 2004, 42,913 students took university education in the context of the Sucre Mission; by 2010, that figure had increased to 462,199.

A comparison of enrolment in the context of the Sucre Mission with enrolment at State-run universities reveals that in 2004, the former accounted for 5.9 per cent of the total; by 2010, that figure had increased to 40.4 per cent. Between 2008 and 2010, 128,410 students graduated under the Sucre Mission.

In 2009, in the framework of the transformation of university education that is being driven by the Sucre Mission, the Bolivarian Government launched the Alma Mater Mission, the aim of which is to promote institutional and geographic articulation along the lines laid down in the National Development Plan (2007-2013), under which the right to university education is available to all, none being excluded.

The components of the Alma Mater Mission are outlined in the following paragraphs.

(a) Conversion of State-run university institutes and colleges into national experimental universities. In 2010, six university institutes of technology were converted into the first six regional polytechnic universities in Apure, Aragua, Barinas, Barlovento, Lara, and the northern part of Táchira.

(b) The establishment of institutions of university education: five universities were established in Venezuela between 1989 and 1998, while between 1999 and 2010, the Revolution established 25 official institutions of university-level education. Nineteen of these are national experimental universities, of which the first was the Bolivarian University of Venezuela, founded in 2003, while the other six are conventional universities.

The establishment of specialized universities has been particularly noteworthy. These include the Experimental University of the Arts, the National Experimental University of Security, the Bolivarian Military University of Venezuela, the Venezuelan University of Hydrocarbons, the Jesús Rivero Bolivarian Workers' University, and the Sports University of the South. Other specialized institutions of university education have been established as well, including the Paulo Freire Latin

American Institute for Agroecology and the Mayor (AV) Miguel Rodríguez University Institute of Civil Aviation.

Two indigenous universities have also been founded: the Amazonas Regional University and the Tauca Indigenous University.

In 2008, as part of the Alma Mater Mission, the national training programmes were established at the initiative of the National Executive, acting through the agency of the Ministry of the People's Power for University Education. These programmes consist of a set of academic activities leading to degrees, diplomas or certificates attesting completion of a course of university-level studies, and were designed in cooperation with national institutions of university education. They conform to the main lines of the national socio-economic development plan. Each programme is administered within one of the educational spaces that have been established throughout the country.

The aim of the national training programmes is to serve as knowledge and learning networks for the generation, transformation and social appropriation of knowledge in the respective areas as a service to the nation. More particularly, the purpose is actively to promote articulation and cooperation among institutions of university education on a basis of solidarity, and to link university education with State bodies, enterprises and social organizations, depending on the relevance of the training and intellectual creation.

As of 2010, 32 national training programmes have been established in a variety of areas, including nursing, physiotherapy, rail transport, police work, tourism, workplace prevention and health, chemistry, music, visual arts, dance and theatre, information science, and geoscience, automotive and electronic engineering.

One national training programme that is particularly noteworthy is the National Integral Community Medicine Programme, the objectives of which are as follows: (a) to provide coverage tailored to the training needs of graduates in the field of integral community medicine, (b) to link teachers and graduates in social territories, and (c) to integrate scientific knowledge and popular wisdom within a single body of knowledge, having regard to respect for multicultural and multiethnic diversity and an overarching strategy of promoting health and quality of life.

As of April 2011, 27,018[8] students were enrolled in the National Integral Community Medicine Programme in 318 municipalities. Of these students, 8,581 had begun in June 2010 and were doing their hospital internships at 181 health centres throughout the country, distributed as follows:

Year of course	*Number of students*
First	4 083
Second	2 222
Third	2 834
Fourth	3 183
Fifth	6 491
Sixth	6 205

[8] Figure available as at April 2011.

C. Achievements and strategies in the cultural sphere

The democratization of culture and the integration of those population groups that have traditionally been excluded from the cultural sphere are objectives toward which tangible progress has been made in the course of the past 11 years.

This new approach to cultural activity in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has yielded a number of achievements, including in particular the establishment of 24 regional printing presses and a dedicated cultural press operation, which have made it possible to democratize books as an educational tool. The opening of 52 "southern bookshops" as distribution facilities and the establishment of 44 art shops have stimulated the creativity of writers and artisans. The founding of the Villa del Cine and the opening of 113 community cinemas, 16 regional cinemas and 15 institutional cinemas is abundant evidence of the Revolution's accomplishments in the sphere of audiovisual creation. In addition, 25 museums and art galleries, three archaeological parks and 11 cultural diversity centres have been founded.

With the implementation of Mission Culture and the introduction of a bachelor's degree in Education with a specialty in cultural development, Venezuela has endowed itself with an army of cultural facilitators working in 98 per cent of the country's municipalities, where they serve to foster a training process that integrates indigenous communities and Afro-Venezuelans while deeply respecting their ancestral knowledge and incorporating the resulting experience into various areas of knowledge.

Another significant achievement has been the State Foundation for the Venezuelan National System of Youth and Children's Orchestras, which in March 2011 became the Simón Bolívar Musical Foundation (Fundamusical Bolívar). Fundamusical Bolívar is a social initiative of the Venezuelan State that fosters the systematization of music instruction and the collective practice of music through the use of a symphonic orchestra and a choir as instruments of social organization and community development. The aim of this initiative is to use music as a means of integrating population groups that have been excluded from society, including primarily children and young people who live in poverty and are vulnerable. The Foundation was designed as a "school of social life", and at the present time just over 300,000 young persons and children are studying music under its auspices. A million Venezuelans are associated directly or indirectly with the system of youth and children's orchestras. The system, which seeks to combat poverty, has reaped many awards and won recognition world-wide, and has served as a model for other countries.

IV. Experiences in the framework of international cooperation

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has made solid, sustained progress in establishing sovereign bilateral and multilateral relations on a basis of solidarity and complementarity, in line with the National Development Plan (2007-2013). In the course of the past few years, Venezuela has intensified and diversified its foreign policy, thereby working effectively for a multipolar world, a Latin American and Caribbean union, and the establishment of strategic political, economic and cultural alliances with a view to fostering the proliferation of new power groupings and hence contributing to the advent of a new global geopolitical configuration.

In this context, education is a strategic factor for cooperation on a basis of solidarity and unity among peoples. Accordingly, interinstitutional relations and international mobility for students and instructors have been encouraged and joint training and research projects developed.

The strategic priority informing Venezuela's international cooperation effort in the field of education is relations with Latin America and the Caribbean, both bilateral (with Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Ecuador and Uruguay) and multilateral (in the context of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of the Americas (ALBA), the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR)). In addition, priority is given to South-South relations with Africa (Algeria, Angola, Cape Verde, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Libya, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Sahrawi Republic, Santo Tomé and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles and Sierra Leone), Asia and the Middle East (China, Vietnam, Iran, Palestine and Syria) and strategic European countries (Russia, France, Belarus, Italy and Ukraine).

Areas deemed to have priority for the establishment of international cooperation relations are food security and sovereignty, public health, education, culture, industrial information and communication technologies, engineering, infrastructure and housing, petroleum, gas and other sources of energy, social sciences, a new international geopolitical configuration, environmental development and tourism.

Venezuela's experiences in international cooperation in the field of education include those outlined below.

Cuba-Venezuela Integral Cooperation Agreement

The Integral Cooperation Agreement has been in effect for 10 years now, and it has enabled the peoples of Cuba and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to make new and significant gains in the field of education.

The first Robinson mission (Robinson I), which was the outcome of a joint effort backed by consistent, relevant Cuban assistance, enabled Venezuela to turn itself into an illiteracy-free territory and pay off a debt of neglect that had been owing to the Venezuelan people for over 40 years. The key to the success of that mission was the Cuban "Yes I can" method.

Venezuela has realized significant achievements in the field of university education since 2000, including in particular the introduction of undergraduate and postgraduate scholarships and the fact that 5,711 Venezuelans are pursuing postgraduate studies through the blended learning modality in use in Venezuela, which enables them to take one-week internships in Cuba in their various fields of knowledge.

In addition, the numbers of undergraduates studying in the Republic of Cuba has grown to 799.

Another aspect of university cooperation with Cuba is based on the view that public health is a fundamental human right and a social safeguard for citizens in their relations with the State. These condiderations, together with the example of

the successful founding of ALBA, prompted the establishment of the Dr. Alejandro Próspero Révérend Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM).

The name of ELAM pays tribute to the eminent French scientist who accompanied the Liberator, Simón Bolívar, in his later life as his personal physician. The school is an outgrowth of the emblematic humanitarian experience of the sister Republic of Cuba, which for decades has trained thousands of community doctors who are now caring for and curing many of their fellow-citizens, carrying the right to health into even the most impoverished corners of Latin America, the Caribbean and the entire world.

ELAM has an international student body, operating as it does in the context of South-South integration. Students are trained in primary care, prevention, and health promotion. ELAM also works closely with the National Integral Community Medicine Programme and the Barrio Adentro Mission, which provide training for professionals who subsequently go to work for the public national health system.

At ELAM, students take six months of premedical training and six years of professional practice in academic venues in communities throughout the country (the municipalization of education), including multipurpose halls, community centres, Barrio Adentro people's clinics, integral diagnostic centres, integral rehabilitation centres, high-technology centres and people's hospital, among others.

Cooperation agreement between the Republic of Portugal and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

One result of the agreement signed between the Government of Portugal and the Government of Venezuela has been that many children and teachers at the basic education level have obtained portable computers under the Canaima educational project; the computers in question were developed in Portugal and assembled in Venezuela. The design of the operating system for these portable devices was integrated with the digital resources generated by the Ministry of the People's Power for Education.

Cooperation agreement between the People's Republic of China and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

With the support of the People's Republic of China, Venezuela developed the Simón Bolívar satellite known as VENESAT-1. The project featured Venezuela's first satellite, which was placed in orbit in 2008, enabling the country to expand its satellite network and provide telecommunications services to areas that are relatively inaccessible, with priority given to the education sector, among others.

In the area of education, the satellite has had a significant impact on integration, as is apparent from the interconnection of 1,012,260 users with a total of 1,928 educational establishments, including 537 Bolivarian information and communication technology centres, 513 Infocentres, 505 schools, including 95 that are already included in the Canaima educational project, 288 parochial management centres, 36 Sucre Mission centres, and 39 other educational establishments.

The aim of the Infocentre programme is to provide community centres with free Internet access, based on open-source software; technological literacy courses are also available to members of the public at these centres. The opening of 737 Infocentres and technological literacy training for some 1,097,000 persons won

recognition in 2010 in the form of the UNESCO King Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa Prize for the use of information and communication technologies in education.

Another of this project's significant achievements has been training for 90 Venezuelan professionals, including 60 who were trained in the satellite's operational and teleport areas and 30 doctoral students at the University of Aeronautics and Astronautics. There will be Venezuela's future scientists.

Grand National ALBA-Education project

In the framework of the Grand National ALBA-Education project, a number of common undergraduate and postgraduate training programmes have been designed for the ALBA countries. These are known as "grand national training programmes" in the fields of the geopolitics of hydrocarbons, education, integral community medicine, tourism, and agriculture and food sovereignty. Furthermore, the Agreement on the Recognition of University Degrees and/or Diplomas among the ALBA member countries has been signed and ratified, with a view to facilitating student mobility and recognition of their educational attainments in their countries of origin.

International scholarships programme

The international scholarships programme is a feature of the Bolivarian Government's South-South cooperation effort. It was launched in 2005, and to date has provided scholarships for more than 2,800 students from 42 Latin American, Caribbean and African countries who are enrolled in 106 training programmes at 38 universities.

The areas of knowledge taught to international students vary, depending on what careers are deemed strategic by their respective countries of origin, with a view to enabling the students subsequently to contribute to the productive social development of their native lands. Common choices include careers in the social sciences, medicine, agricultural science, engineering in various fields, education sciences, and computer science.

Agreements on the recognition of university degrees

In the framework of the new geopolitics of the south (Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and the Middle East), work is continuing on degree recognition agreements with the various sister countries with a presence in Venezuela's universities, based on the principles of quality and social relevance and with a clear orientation toward the strengthening, credibility and strategic positioning of the Bolivarian Revolution on the international scene.

Cooperation with Africa

In the field of university education, a total of 271 undergraduate scholarships have been awarded to young students from 16 African countries (Cape Verde, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Libya, Namibia, Nigeria, Sahrawi Republic, Santo Tomé and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Angola, Mozambique and Gambia) with a view to strengthening their training in fields that are strategically important for their countries. Once they have completed their studies, they will be able to return home and use their knowledge to bring about meaningful change in their societies.

Agreements on university-level educational materials have been signed with four African countries: Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Libya and Namibia, and one degree recognition agreement has been signed with Gambia. These represent a significant achievement ensuring the effectiveness of the cooperation effort.

The International Robinson Mission

The International Robinson Mission was launched in the framework of ALBA on 19 March 2006. Its aim is to promote cooperation and exchanges of experience in the fields of education and sports with Latin American and other countries around the world that require the implementation of literacy and integral education programmes. At the present time, Venezuelans are working as volunteers in the context of this mission in the Republic of Bolivia and the Republic of Nicaragua.

V. Remaining challenges

The Bolivarian Revolution is still confronted with a number of challenges. Foremost among these is the need to continue making progress with the rehabilitation of State-run school buildings used for preprimary, primary and intermediate education, including Simoncitos, Bolivarian schools, Bolivarian secondary schools and Robinsonian technical schools respectively.

A second remaining challenge is the need to reduce the number of pupils per classroom at the basic education level, mainly in urban areas. This will entail the construction of new school buildings.

A further significant challenge for the Bolivarian Revolution is further progress with curriculum design based on humanistic values, characterized by respect for cultural diversity and multiculturalism, taking into account the social focus of science, promoting love for one's country, and pursuing sustainable development. This implies a need to progress along integrating lines in curriculum development and the relevant aspects as summarized in various publications, including studies on educational orientations for integral risk management in the basic education subsystem of the Venezuelan education system, the main lines of bilingual intercultural education curricula, strategic guidelines for sexual education curricula, and draft fundamental elements for strategic curriculum orientations relating to human rights and values in the basic education subsystem.

In the case of the university subsystem, one of the main challenges facing the Bolivarian Revolution, and one that must be addressed, is the universalization of education at that level. In addition, increased access to the postgraduate level and diversification at that level are important, in accordance with the national development plan (2007-2013).

The last of the major remaining challenges that the Bolivarian Government will have to confront in the years ahead is the task of integrating this large contingent of university graduates into the workforce.

One challenge relating to the bilingual intercultural modality is how to extend it to as many indigenous persons as possible, motivate them to pursue their optimal integration into the education system and thereafter, and stimulate them to preserve their traditions and customs.

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Report of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names on the work of its twenty-sixth session

(Vienna, 2-6 May 2011)

Summary

The twenty-sixth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names was held at the United Nations Office at Vienna from 2 to 6 May 2011, in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2009/269.

The present report describes the activities of the session and presents the major findings of the Group of Experts, focusing primarily on the importance of its work in supporting United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names and the essential assistance it continues to afford Member States in the geographical information field and related cartographic areas.

* E/2011/100.

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I. Matters calling for action by the Economic and Social Council or brought to its attention

Draft decision for adoption by the Council

1. The United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names recommends to the Council the adoption of the following draft decision:

Report of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names on its twenty-sixth session, and the provisional agenda and dates for the twenty-seventh session, and the dates for the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

The Economic and Social Council:

(a) Takes note of the report of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names on its twenty-sixth session;

(b) Decides that the twenty-seventh session of the Group of Experts shall be held in New York on 6 and 17 August 2012, and approves the provisional agenda for the session as set out below:

Provisional agenda for the twenty-seventh session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

1. Opening of the session.
2. Adoption of the agenda.
3. Report of the working groups.
4. Reports of the liaison officers.
5. Organizational matters concerning the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.
6. Review of the statute of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.
7. Election of officers.
8. Planning for the implementation of the recommendations of the Tenth Conference.
9. Working groups for future requirements.
10. Provisional agenda for the twenty-eighth session of the Group of Experts.
11. Other business.

(c) Decides that the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names shall be held in New York from 7 to 16 August 2012, and approves the provisional agenda for the Conference as set out below:

Provisional agenda for the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

1. Opening of the Conference.
2. Election of the President of the Conference.
3. Organizational matters:
   (a) Adoption of the rules of procedure;
   (b) Adoption of the agenda;
   (c) Election of officers other than the President;
   (d) Organization of work;
   (e) Credentials of representatives to the Conference.
4. Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries and on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names since the Ninth Conference (for distribution only).
5. Reports on the work of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names and its divisions, working groups and task teams since the Ninth Conference.
6. National and international meetings, conferences, symposiums, publicity and publications.
7. Measures taken and proposed to implement United Nations resolutions on the standardization of geographical names, including the economic and social benefits.
8. National standardization:
   (a) Field collection of names;
   (b) Office treatment of names;
   (c) Treatment of names in multilingual areas;
   (d) Administrative structure of national names authorities, legislation, policies and procedures;
   (e) Toponymic guidelines for map editors and other editors.
9. Geographical names as culture, heritage and identity (including indigenous, minority and regional language names).
10. Exonyms.
11. Toponymic data files and gazetteers:
   (a) Content requirements;
   (b) Data models and classifications;
   (c) Data maintenance;
   (d) Data standards and interoperability;

(e) Data services, applications and products (for example, gazetteers and web services).

12. Terminology in the standardization of geographical names.

13. Writing systems and pronunciation:

(a) Romanization;

(b) Conversion into non-Roman writing systems;

(c) Writing of names in unwritten languages;

(d) Pronunciation.

14. Country names.

15. Toponymic education.

16. Features beyond a single sovereignty and international cooperation:

(a) Features common to two or more nations;

(b) Bilateral/multilateral agreements.

17. Arrangements for the Eleventh Conference.

18. Adoption of resolutions of the Conference.

19. Adoption of the report of the Conference.

20. Closing of the Conference.

II. Items for discussion and decision

A. Report of the Chair

2. The Chair began her report (GEGN/26/10)[1] by reminding the experts that the Group of Experts' work over the past 50 years had shown that there would always be new challenges. To meet those challenges and the needs of the community, the Group of Experts would need to continue to develop methods to deal with emerging technologies and increased expectations. A summary was given of some of the recent activities of the divisions and working groups, cooperation with the secretariat and the liaison with scientific and academic groups. The Chair thanked the Statistics Division, in particular the secretariat of the Group of Experts, for its ongoing support and for the preparations for the current session.

B. Report of the secretariat of the Group of Experts

3. The report of the secretariat (GEGN/26/11)[1] summarized the three areas of focus, publications, the Group of Experts website and the maintenance of the Group of Experts World Geographical Names Database. Areas for future focus included continuing to improve the website, adding more information and audio files to the

[1] Available from http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/ungegn3ession26.html.

database and preparing for the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

C. Reports of the divisions

4. Working paper No. 83 was presented, containing a summary of the 14 divisional reports received prior to the session, as listed below. Topics addressed included the structure and contents of the reports, division compositions and level of activities, regional collaboration and joint projects. Divisional reports related to national standardization, multilingual and minority names and languages, support for international programmes, toponymic training, cultural heritage and the preservation of historical names, toponymic material and mapping programmes, databases, websites and portals, writing systems and maritime, undersea and other names. The challenges facing divisions were also mentioned. The following divisional reports were received prior to the session:

Working paper No. 3, East Central and South-East Europe Division

Working paper No. 8, Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia Division

Working paper No. 9, Asia South-East and Pacific South-West

Working paper No. 10, Norden Division

Working paper No. 15, Asia South-West Division (other than Arabic)

Working paper No. 18, Africa Central Division

Working paper No. 35, China Division

Working paper No. 40, Arabic Division

Working paper No. 41, Africa East Division

Working paper No. 42, United Kingdom Division

Working paper No. 45, Baltic Division

Working paper No. 48, Portuguese-speaking Division

Working paper No. 75, United States of America/Canada Division

Working paper No. 76, Dutch- and German-speaking Division

Four additional division reports were received after the compilation of the summary:

Working paper No. 89, Africa South Division

Working paper No. 91, Africa West Division

Working paper No. 92, Latin American Division

Working paper No. 93, French-speaking Division

5. In addressing Working paper No. 84, the Chair emphasized that the summary report method used for the divisional reports in no way diminished the importance of the work undertaken by the divisions to support and encourage the standardization of geographical names by division members. Input was invited from the experts on methods to support divisions that were struggling, ideas on how divisional structures could be used to assist countries that did not have a national

standardization programme and the most useful or relevant tasks and projects for divisions to undertake.

D. Reports of the liaison officers and international organizations

1. International Hydrographic Organization

6. Working paper No. 88, submitted by the International Hydrographic Organization, reported on two of its activities related to geographical names: undersea feature naming and the publication *Limits of Oceans and Seas*.[2] The Subcommittee on Undersea Feature Names of the General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans had met twice in the past two years and had considered 92 name proposals. The Working Group on the Revision of Special Publication No. 23 had met twice to resolve issues related to the publication of the fourth edition of *Limits of Oceans and Seas* but had not yet achieved consensus. An expert from the Asia East Division (other than China) expressed regret over the description in the report of the International Hydrographic Organization that there had been "encouraging support" for the proposal from the Chair Group of the Working Group on the Revision of Special Publication No. 23, in spite of the objections, reservations or abstentions by a number of countries. At the Chair's invitation, the liaison officer for the International Hydrographic Organization offered details on how Member States could participate in the Subcommittee.

2. International Council of Onomastic Sciences

7. In Working paper No. 90, the liaison officer with the International Council of Onomastic Sciences reported on the activities of that organization. The Council regularly issued a journal and newsletters; it had also issued an invitation to participate in its congress in Barcelona in September 2011, to which 87 papers on toponymy had already been submitted. A terminology group had been established, which cooperated with the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology.

3. Other papers

8. The following information papers were mentioned:

Working paper No. 81, Report of the Pan American Institute of Geography and History

Contact information on national geographical names authorities (GEGN/26/7)[1]

Form on contact information for national geographical names authorities (GEGN/26/7/Add.1)[1]

The Chair noted that informal contacts with the International Geographical Union had been established to discuss appropriate forms of liaison.

[2] International Hydrographic Organization, *Limits of Oceans and Seas*, Special Publication No. 23, 3rd edition (Monte Carlo, 1953).

E. Activities of the Task Team for Africa

9. In Working paper No. 4, the Coordinator for the Task Team for Africa cited the Team's recent achievements. In collaboration with the Chair of the Group of Experts and the Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy, training courses had been held in Nairobi in 2009 and in Yaoundé in 2010, and a course was planned to be held in South Africa in 2011. An Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) toponymic database now called "Africa GeoNyms", designed to cover all African countries, had been presented at the twenty-fifth session of the Group of Experts. Two toponymic contests had been organized in 2009 and 2011. Several workshops on toponymic standardization had been held by the Task Team at the current session.

10. In Working paper No. 60, the expert from the Africa South Division reported on the establishment, composition, activities and methodology of the Botswana Place Names Commission. The Commission addressed problems in toponymic standardization across the many dialects of Botswana and its national language, Tswana. The Commission cooperated with the Botswana national mapping agency and needed to cooperate with other African countries to benefit from their shared experiences. The expert recommended holding annual toponymic training courses in Botswana.

11. Working paper No. 51, submitted by South Africa, and a conference room paper, submitted by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, were not presented.

F. Implementation of resolutions and activities related to the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation

12. Working paper No. 46 reported on the meetings of the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation, one in Nairobi in 2009 and one in Vancouver, Canada, in 2010, both of which had been held jointly with the Working Group on Publicity and Funding. The work on the searchable database of Group of Experts English resolutions was highlighted. That software could be made available for the development of a similar database for the French and Spanish resolutions. It was proposed that research on the resolutions should be conducted, in order to promote their effective implementation.

13. The following documents were submitted for information purposes:

Resolutions adopted at the nine United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names: 1967, 1972, 1977, 1982, 1987, 1992, 1998, 2002 and 2007 (GEGN/26/8)[1]

Resolutions from the Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, 2007, New York (GEGN/26/9)[1]

G. Activities relating to the Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy

14. The Convener of the Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy reported, in Working paper No. 72 (revision 1), on the training course in Yaoundé (Group of Experts) and Madrid (Pan American Institute of Geography and History)

and on the web course on toponymy. Participants on the Institute's twenty-first course on geographical names, held in Madrid in October 2009, concluded that a more advanced course was needed for sustainable progress. Further toponymic training courses were to be held at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa, in September 2011, and in Indonesia in 2012. The Institute's next toponymy course would be held in Belize in August 2011.

15. Working paper No. 19 reported on an initiative of the Africa Central Division to launch activities for the standardization of geographical names. It dealt with the training course on toponymy held in Yaoundé in November 2010, which had been attended by four countries. A DVD of all presentations was distributed to official authorities in the region and to all participants. Further steps to spread toponymic information would be taken.

16. Working paper No. 47 from the Asia East Division (other than China) provided information on the fifteenth International Seminar on Sea Names, held in Sydney, Australia, in September 2009, and on the sixteenth Seminar held in The Hague in August 2010. All papers and programmes could be downloaded from http://geo.khu.ac.kr/seanames. The seventeenth International Seminar on Sea Names was scheduled to be held in Vancouver in August 2011.

17. The Convener also gave a visual presentation of the International Cartographic Association's web course on toponymy, available from http://lazarus.elte.hu/cet. The interactive course offered introductions and exercises for 11 toponymic modules and referenced the Group of Experts documents to be used. An additional nine modules were being prepared with the financial support of the Statistics Division (see http://toponymycourses.geog.uu.nl/ICAcourses/index.html). The Chair of the Arabic Division suggested that an Arabic translation of the modules of the Association's toponymy web course could be undertaken by the Division. The Convener welcomed that proposal. There would be no copyright restriction on the modules.

H. Activities relating to the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers

18. The Convener presented Working paper No. 37 containing the summary report of the Working Group's activities. The report presented the workplan, progress in the workplan since the last Group of Experts session, recent Working Group meetings and activities planned for the future.

19. Working paper No. 1, presented by an expert from the Arabic Division, discussed Algeria's geographical names database. The National Institute of Cartography and Remote Sensing had developed and completed a multistep process for compiling place names taken from topographic maps at various scales into digital files. The database would eventually also include place names taken from digital topographic map files at a scale of 1:50,000. It was currently for internal use only but might become available to the public in the future. It was noted that the place names were shown on the topographic maps and in the database in Roman script, but Arabic transcription was included in the database.

20. An expert from the Asia East Division (other than China) presented Working paper No. 7 concerning the digital Japan basic map, which was being developed by

the Geospatial Information Authority of Japan as a result of the Basic Act on the Advancement of Utilizing Geospatial Information, 2007. The digital database contained geospatial data, orthophotos and geographical names. The creation of the geographical names database had begun in 2010 with populated places. Future work would include adding the names of natural features to the database. The Authority's plans to address a variety of challenging issues in the development of the geographical names database were also discussed.

21. An expert from the Asia South-West Division (other than Arabic) presented Working paper No. 14 detailing the pilot project to develop the first volume of an Iranian topographic names gazetteer. Although the Iranian Government had been involved in gazetteer production for many years, the current project would be the first to include a variety of feature types (more than 100). The pilot project was over the Kashan area in the central part of the Islamic Republic of Iran and was based on 1:25,000 scale topographic maps. The report presented the feature classes, fields of information and total number of names (1,961) presented in the Kashan gazetteer. Once completed, the gazetteer would be submitted for the approval of the Iranian Committee on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

22. An expert from the Latin America Division presented Working paper No. 17 concerning the development of the Basic Geographic Gazetteer of Spain registry under the auspices of the National Geographic Institute. The names were derived from 1:25,000 scale mapping and would be collected for a wide range of feature types. The paper detailed the seven-step approach used to review and prepare the place names to be included in the registry. The separation of authority between the Government of Spain and the autonomous communities was reviewed in the report and in the subsequent discussion. The registry was expected to be completed later in 2011 or 2012.

23. Working paper No. 26 was submitted by an expert from the East Central and South-East Europe Division. The report discussed the 2006 completion of volume 1 of the National Gazetteer of Poland, which consisted solely of hydronyms, or names of both flowing and standing bodies of water, and was the first in a series of volumes based on the Polish State Register of Geographical Names established from 1:10,000 scale maps by the Head Office of Geodesy and Cartography. The report provided many informative details about the content and format of the gazetteer. The gazetteer was available for download from the website of the Commission on Standardization of Geographical Names Outside the Republic of Poland.

24. Information concerning the Republic of Korea's marine geographical names programme was presented in Working paper No. 82. The Republic of Korea had been actively involved in standardizing marine geographical names since 2002, with 538 feature names currently registered and listed in *Kwanbo*, the official gazette of the laws of the Republic of Korea. A number of names had also been approved for inclusion in the International Hydrographic Organization/Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission-General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans Gazetteer of Undersea Feature Names.

25. Working paper No. 85 was presented by an expert from the United States of America/Canada Division. The report summarized the recent successful implementation of a web-feature service-gazetteer by the United States Board on Geographic Names for both its domestic and foreign names databases. The web service made it possible to view multiple gazetteer data sources in a common

geospatial client. Additional funding and the development of an open geospatial consortium standard for the web-feature service-gazetteer were vital for the development of future enhancements.

26. The following three papers were submitted for information only:

Working paper No. 38 related to the EuroGeoNames project

Working paper No. 43 related to the important topic of text-encoding

Working paper No. 53 outlining the benefits provided by South Africa's geographical names database

27. Eleven papers were submitted under agenda item 9; most concerned national activities but two (Unicode and EuroGeoNames) concerned international programmes. A common theme was the expanding use of geographical names data for an increasing range of purposes. That very positive trend was fully in line with resolution VIII/6 of the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, which recommended better integration of geographical names into national and regional spatial data infrastructures. The importance of establishing and providing reliable and standardized geographical names had been recognized by the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management as an essential part of geospatial information management.

I. Activities relating to the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology

28. Working paper No. 20, presented by an expert from the Arabic Division, reported on the activities of its Committee on Toponymic Terminology. The composition of the Committee had been revised in connection with the 2010 meeting in Beirut. Proposed changes to the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names glossary were presented (see Working paper No. 11). Efforts to set up a common Arabic glossary of generic terms had resulted in a number of submissions, and a common layout had been proposed in order to establish and adopt unique generic forms.

29. In Working paper No. 66, an expert from the Dutch- and German-speaking Division reported on the third edition of the *German Glossary of Toponymic Terminology* published by Ständiger Ausschuss für geographische Namen (see www.stagn.de). With 17 new terms added and 6 terms modified, the German glossary now had 375 entries. Some systemic adjustments had been made in line with the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names glossary.

30. In Working paper No. 80, the Convener presented a report of the activities of the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology. Since the last session, one meeting had been held in Uppsala, Sweden, in October 2010, and cooperation with the terminology group of the International Council of Onomastic Sciences was ongoing. A selection of examples had been discussed at the Working Group meeting, and amendments and addenda to the current United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names glossary were being proposed. A proposition to initiate a process for creating a database from the existing records of the Group of Experts

glossary (2002) and addendum (2007) was mentioned. Translation of the glossary into other languages was encouraged.

31. Working paper No. 11, submitted by the Arabic Division, proposed a number of modifications to the Arabic translation of the glossary, in particular with respect to alphabetization, translation, content and examples.

J. Activities relating to the Working Group on Romanization Systems

32. The Convener summarized the activities of the Working Group since the twenty-fifty session in Working paper No. 2. Since 2009, a number of systems had been updated; they had been included in the Working paper, and on the Working Group's website, www.eki.ee/wgrs.

33. The Convener provided statistics concerning the number of United Nations-approved systems and the level of their implementation, and encouraged members with writing systems that had no approved Romanization system to present their national systems to the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names through the Working Group.

34. Working paper No. 21, presented by an expert from the Eastern Europe Northern and Central Asia Division, described the official adoption by Ukraine in January 2010 of a system for the Romanization of Ukrainian. The system incorporated several changes to the one approved in 1996, and brought into line all systems used for the Romanization of proper names in Ukraine. It was anticipated that the amended system would be presented at the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 2012. Several questions concerning the update of names on Ukraine's maps and the development of systems targeted towards different receiver languages were raised.

35. Working paper No. 36 was presented by an expert from the China Division. It outlined the methods used to transfer foreign geographical names into Chinese, describing the principles behind the appropriate selection of characters and the different rules applied for foreign names written in Chinese characters. The standards were currently published in hard copy only, but it was envisaged that the eight transcription keys already created would be posted online in due course.

36. An expert from the East Central and South-East Europe Division introduced a newly ratified national system for the Romanization of Georgian and described the background to the development of the system. A Governmental commission on the identification, normalization, usage, registration and protection of names of geographical features of Georgia was responsible for overseeing the application of the system and was creating a register of names. Working paper No. 94 detailed the inventory of characters and contained descriptions of their phonetic characteristics.

K. Activities relating to the Working Group on Country Names

37. The Convener presented the summary report of the Working Group's activities as Working paper No. 55. The main objective of the Working Group was the compilation of the List of Country Names. The current official version had been approved at the Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 2007. Working paper No. 54 presented the current working

draft of the Country Names List, including updates since 2007. The Convener invited the respective experts to provide Internet addresses at which nationally approved lists of country names could be found. That information would be compiled into a working paper for the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names to be held in 2012. An expert from the Romano-Hellenic Division, the expert from Greece, expressed his objection to the International Organization for Standardization country and language code and language name included in the entry concerning the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. At the request of a member from the East Central and South-East Europe Division, the Chair read excerpts from the mandate of the Group of Experts and of the Working Group, in order to clarify the mandate of the Group of Experts. The member from the East Central and South-East Europe Division made a statement expressing his deep regret regarding the content and qualifications contained in the interventions made by the experts from Greece, which, according to him, were not in accordance with the statute and rules of procedure of the Group of Experts.

38. Working paper No. 54, the current draft of the Country Names List, was submitted for information purposes.

L. Activities relating to the Working Group on Publicity and Funding

39. Working paper No. 5, presented by the Deputy Convener, reported on the activities of the Working Group on Publicity and Funding. Meetings had been held in Nairobi in 2009 and in Vancouver in 2010, and the Working Group had actively promoted the Group of Experts by means of a press release following the twenty-fifth session, participation in conferences with papers and posters, Group of Experts session postcards, the release of a press kit and so forth. In addition, the Working Group had worked on finding financial support for training courses and for the attendance of representatives of developing countries at the twenty-sixth session. It was recommended that the Working Group check Wikipedia information on the Group of Experts for correctness.

40. In Working paper No. 16, an expert from the Asia South-West Division (other than Arabic) reported on the Iranian National Committee on the Standardization of Geographical Names website (http://geonames.ncc.org.ir), recently redesigned to meet newly emerged needs for accessing information on standardized geographical names. The website provided access to the Iranian national geographical names database by means of various defined search criteria. Information relative to endonyms and exonyms related to selected features of the original database were to be added to the website at a later stage.

41. On behalf of the Working Group Convener, Working paper No. 87, an English language version of a new Group of Experts media kit, was introduced. The media kit consisted of 12 information sheets addressing core topics related to geographical names issues and to the Group of Experts. The aim of the promotional material was to advance a greater understanding of geographical names issues worldwide. After correction, the texts would be translated into the six United Nations languages.

42. Working paper No. 28, related to the Polish-language versions of the Group of Experts brochure "Consistent Use of Place Names" and of resolutions adopted at the

United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names was submitted for information.

M. Activities relating to the Working Group on Exonyms

43. The Convener reported that the proceedings of the previous Working Group meeting, which had been held in Tainach, Austria, from 28 to 30 April 2010, had been published and could be purchased on the publisher's website (www.verlagdrkovac.de).

44. The expert from the Dutch- and German-speaking Division presented Working paper No. 69, which put forward the position that social groups were the principal, and even exclusive, agents in the naming process, and proposed that only through perception did the exonym/endonym divide become meaningful, that divide being a logical consequence of the sociological, political and juridical nature of human interaction. Certain issues related both to the content of the paper and to the aims of the Working Group were discussed and clarified.

45. Working paper No. 64 on the establishment of criteria for the politically sensitive use of exonyms was described by the expert from the Dutch- and German-speaking Division. The paper provided a detailed proposed scheme of selection criteria for the appropriate use of exonyms, and presented a revised version of criteria that had been the subject of Working Group discussion at several meetings. The paper would be discussed at the out-of-session Working Group meeting.

46. Working paper No. 65, which considered whether "exonym" was an appropriate term for names of features beyond any sovereignty, was also presented by the expert from the Dutch- and German-speaking Division. The paper restated differing views of the Working Group members. Participants in the session considered a number of concepts fundamental to the exonym/endonym debate.

47. Three documents were listed for information:

Working paper No. 24, Polish lists of geographical names of the world

Working paper No. 68, Report of the Working Group on Exonyms

Working paper No. 71, "Trends in Exonym Use" and the proceedings of the 10th meeting of the Group of Experts Working Group on Exonyms, described above

N. Activities relating to the Working Group on Pronunciation

48. The Convener presented Working paper No. 59 describing the Working Group's meeting at the twenty-fifth session, its current workplan, and issues to be addressed at future meetings. The experts discussed the benefits of using the International Phonetic Alphabet to represent pronunciation and the possible inclusion of a less complex method of denoting sounds. The provision of digital audio files in various formats was also discussed.

49. An expert from the Arabic Division reported on geographical names work in Jordan, outlining the responsibilities of its national committee on geographical names and describing its toponymic database and mapping. Working paper No. 61

introduced the theme of Jordanian dialects, and the expert explained their geographical distribution and provided examples of differences in the regional pronunciation of terms. The research project described in the Working paper had focused on transliteration and special features of and variations in the Jordanian dialects.

50. The Convener gave a presentation on sound files in the Placenames Database of Ireland (www.logainm.ie). The database had been launched in October 2008 and contained official English and Irish language versions of approximately 100,000 place names. Sound files indicating the pronunciation of names in English and Irish were being recorded using local speakers and were being added as an important component of the database. The Convener described the categories of the names recorded and the work procedure, and gave a demonstration of the audio files.

O. Activities relating to the Working Group on the Promotion of the Recording and Use of Indigenous, Minority and Regional Language Group Geographical Names

51. The Convener presented Working paper No. 78, which reported on progress on the Working Group's workplan and noted that the Group now had access to a web discussion forum hosted by the Government of Australia. It was agreed that the Working Group would compile web pages to be hosted on the Group of Experts website.

52. Working paper No. 23 was presented by an expert from the East Central and South-East Europe Division. The paper described Poland's 2005 Act on national and ethnic minorities and regional languages, detailed the relevant minorities, languages and areas, and reported on the resulting introduction of minority-language place names in the applicable areas. Participants discussed the paper, clarifying in particular the terminology denoting ethnicity and the status of a name.

53. Working paper No. 34 was presented by an expert from the Norden Division. The paper reported on a divisional study that monitored the inclusion of indigenous, minority and regional language group geographical names in the datasets of the Nordic National Mapping Agencies and outlined the study's results. Discussion focused on the presentation of minority language names on road signs in the respective countries.

54. Working paper No. 77, presented by an expert from the Asia South-East Pacific South-West Division, reported on the production of guidelines on respecting cultural sensitivity when conducting dialogue with indigenous communities in both Australia and New Zealand. It was noted that understanding of the specific aboriginal cultures had assisted in relationship-building and thus had facilitated information-gathering, and that the collected, community-authorized names data had been incorporated into the national nomenclature and into maps.

P. Geographical names and cultural heritage

55. Working paper No. 6, presented by an expert from the Arabic Division, summarized the association of place names in Egypt with the fundamental cultural heritage of the community. A number of factors had been involved in the creation of

the cultural facets of place names, including historical linguistic variations, the names of people, tribes and families, flora, fauna and specific events, and cultural characteristics. Those factors had blended into a rich cultural fabric represented in the place names of the country.

56. In Working paper No. 29, an expert from the Dutch- and German-speaking Division summarized the relationship between geographical names and the cultural heritage of Suriname. It was pointed out that Suriname was a multicultural and multilingual society, and particular processes and policies were required to ensure that the aims of cultural retention were reached.

57. Working paper No. 32, presented by an expert from the Norden Division, summarized the involvement of geographical names in a recent "campaign for cultural environment" in Finland, which was aimed at enhancing the public's interest in its immediate surroundings, including geographical names. Posters related to a number of aspects of geographical naming were put on display to raise the general awareness of the community.

58. As there was no expert from South Africa present, Working paper No. 50 on the South African national hearings on geographical names was submitted for information purposes.

59. Working paper No. 56, which outlined a concept of the evaluation of the cultural value of geographical names, was presented by an expert from the French-speaking Division. The aim of that process was to identify geographical names that could be covered by the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The proposed assessment criteria were outlined.

Q. Issues of toponymic standardization

60. Working paper No. 12, presented by an expert from the Asia South-West Division (other than Arabic), discussed the standardization of urban place and street names. It was pointed out that the growth of urban areas made it more difficult to ensure that place names were standardized to enable consistent data to be made available to all users. Instructions and methods had been documented to assist in that process.

61. In Working paper No. 58, an expert from the Norden Division discussed the development of a standard for location addresses in Sweden. The standard was aimed at ensuring consistency in the approximately 5 million addresses in Sweden. A handbook had been prepared to assist in the implementation of the standard.

62. Working paper No. 74, presented by an expert from the Norden Division, summarized the aims of the new law in Norway for the registration of property, including regulating the assignment of addresses to all properties. One of the aims was to preserve farm and other cultural names in the addresses. Courses had been held to assist municipal authorities in effectively managing the addressing process.

63. An expert from the East Central and South-East Europe Division presented Working paper No. 25, which outlined the structures used in Poland to achieve geographical names standardization and the current legislative frameworks. All names derived from different naming processes had been included in the database. The roles of the two advisory commissions were summarized.

64. Owing to the absence of a presenter at the session, the following working papers were not presented:

Working paper No. 52, South Africa

Working paper No. 79, Senegal

65. Working paper No. 63, which described the publication of a document entitled "Geographical Names — Variety and Norm" (Geographische Namen — Vielfalt und Norm), commemorating, among other things, the fortieth anniversary of the Austrian Board on Geographical Names, was presented for information.

R. Toponymic guidelines for map editors and other editors

66. After the Chair briefly described the history of toponymic guidelines within the Group of Experts, Working paper No. 70 (revision 1) was presented by the Coordinator for Toponymic Guidelines. The paper described the status of new, updated, revised or planned toponymic guidelines submitted to the Group of Experts, in preparation for the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. Possible solutions were offered to countries who had yet to submit toponymic guidelines. Links to pronunciation audio files for toponymic guidelines were encouraged, with the participation of the Working Group on Pronunciation, and a suggestion was made for a Wikipedia entry on toponymic guidelines.

67. Working paper No. 86 contained a template for the content of toponymic guidelines. It provided a useful reference to a standardized process for countries wishing to produce toponymic guidelines.

68. The following working papers described new, revised or updated toponymic guidelines:

Working paper No. 22, Ukraine

Working paper No. 27, Poland

Working paper No. 31, Finland

Working paper No. 39, Germany

69. The Coordinator for Toponymic Guidelines, Isolde Hausner (Austria), announced her resignation. The floor agreed to the appointment of her colleague, Hubert Bergmann (Austria), as the new coordinator.

S. Other toponymic issues

70. Working paper No. 13 described current efforts in the Islamic Republic of Iran to move away from manual field collection and registration of geographical names in favour of digital data collection. It described the development of software and methodology to increase precision and reduce errors in field collection.

71. Working paper No. 33 announced that the National Land Survey of Finland had made available data from its geographic names register free of charge. The data included web feature service as well as small-scale mapping products in vector and raster formats. In the conclusion of the paper, experts from Australia, Canada,

Jamaica, Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland reported that toponymic data from their countries were also available free of charge.

72. Working paper No. 73 described the increasing influence of commercial and private concerns in the naming of places in Norway. Arenas and other facilities with established names were being renamed by sponsors, and real estate companies were seeking to change names of residential developments to make them more saleable. Comments from the floor indicated that the trend was occurring elsewhere.

73. The celebration of 100 years of place name management in Quebec, Canada, in 2012 was the theme of Working paper No. 57. The history and context of the naming authorities in Quebec were summarized, and commemorative events of the Commission de toponymie were described, including a colloquium and a publication provisionally entitled "Parlers et paysages du Québec". Experts were invited to attend the events.

74. Working paper No. 49, a report from the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, was offered as a supplement to the presentation given by that organization, described in paragraph 78 below.

75. Working paper No. 67 from Austria described the launch of a new toponymic book series entitled *Name and Place*, edited by Peter Jordan and Paul Woodman. The first volume was entitled *Trends in Exonym Use: Proceedings of the 10th UNGEGN Working Group on Exonyms Meeting, Tainach, 28-30 April 2010*.[3]

Special presentations

76. A presentation was given by the Chief of the Statistical Services Branch, Statistics Division, on the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, regarding the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management initiative. The lack of an intergovernmental platform to discuss the broad aspects of geospatial information at a global level had been identified and had become the motivating factor for the initiative. The envisaged general outcome was an improvement in meeting national and international spatial information needs for addressing such policy issues as climate change and natural disasters. It was pointed out that there would be no changes to the Group of Experts, but rather an opportunity to establish effective relationships that would further its work. Additional information was available at the Group of Experts website (http://ggim.un.org).

77. After noting that the Group of Experts had formally established a liaison with the Unicode Consortium in 2002, the Chair introduced two people from that consortium, one present at the session (Ken Whistler) and the other participating by videoconference (Mark Davis). The latter gave a presentation entitled "Unicode transliteration", which focused on the goals and rules of language transliteration by Unicode as displayed in a wide array of digital media, such as cell phones and computer software. An example of the toponymic use of such "transliterators" was presented, using a Google maps image of the city of Buenos Aires. The Group of Experts' participation in those efforts was welcomed.

[3] Peter Jordan and others, eds. *Name and Place*, vol. 1, *Trends in Exonym Use: Proceedings of the 10th UNGEGN Working Group on Exonyms Meeting, Tainach, 28-30 April 2010* (Hamburg, Dr. Kovač, 2011).

78. An update on recent activities was provided by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, the global organization that coordinates the unique identifiers used for names on the Internet. Two activities relevant to the session were highlighted by the presenters (Patrick Jones and Naela Sarras), namely the internationalized domain names for countries and the generic top-level domain programme. It was noted that 3 out of the 34 requests made to the Corporation for unique internationalized domain names had been solved with help from the Group of Experts, and it was hoped that the Group would continue to provide advice as more countries made requests.

79. Kaisa Rautio Helander (on videoconference) and Carl Christian Olsen introduced a new organization called the International Council on Indigenous Place Names. Its aim was to advance and coordinate information on indigenous place names, promote the future involvement of indigenous communities in the protection of indigenous place names and make those names available to national and regional authorities. The Council had held its first conference in Norway in 2010 and would hold the second in Canada in 2013. The structure of the Council's board, including membership from geographical regions, was discussed. Cooperation with the Group of Experts was encouraged, in particular through the Working Group on the Promotion of the Recording and Use of Indigenous, Minority and Regional Language Group Geographical Names. Mr. Olsen (President of the Council) accepted an invitation to be the liaison officer between the Group of Experts and the Council.

80. A video presentation followed by a telephone conference with Suha Ülgen enabled experts to better understand the initiative of the United Nations Geographic Information Working Group and the Office of Information and Communications Technology regarding the proposed United Nations gazetteer framework. The project aims and objectives with respect to indexing place names databases were outlined and examples of the benefits for humanitarian aid were stressed. The project plan would cover the next three years and cooperation with the Group of Experts was implicit. Mr. Ülgen was invited to present a follow-up report at the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. The Indonesian National Coordinating Agency for Surveying and Mapping (Bakosurtanal) will participate as a pilot site in the gazetteer framework project of the centre of excellence for the Statistics Division for the benefit of geographical names standardization in Indonesia.

81. A presentation was given by Crystal Sholts of Google Earth, summarizing the current situation within Google in relation to place names usage. The development and use of Map Maker, Google's community mapping tool, were also discussed.

82. A presentation was given by William Watt from Australia on recent experiences in Australia and New Zealand with regard to place names activities in natural disasters. A series of devastating bushfires, floods, cyclones and earthquakes in those countries since 2009 had challenged disaster management efforts, creating a critical need to maintain accurate and timely place names data. The various uses of place names in the management of those disasters, together with the resulting positive outcomes and needed improvements, were examined.

83. André Nonguierma and Yoseph Mekasha of ECA joined the session via videolink to report on the recent meeting of the Committee on Development Information, Science and Technology. A brief overview of the meeting was given,

with particular reference to the work of the subcommittee on geo-information. It was pointed out that Member States had been asked to consider the need to set up place-naming authorities and adopt the guide prepared by the Group of Experts as a basic framework for that purpose. ECA advised that all possible support, subject to available resources, would be given to support the efforts of Member States in geographical names standardization at the strategic level and for specific projects. Discussions emphasized the need for more effective involvement by ECA in promoting geographical names in Africa.

T. Preparations for the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

84. The provisional agenda for the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (GEGN/26/6)[1] was circulated for information purposes. The Conference was planned to be held in New York from 7 to 16 August 2012. The Chair mentioned that the provisional agenda had been set at the Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, but, if necessary, the Group of Experts could recommend amendments to the agenda at the beginning of the Tenth Conference.

U. Provisional agenda for the twenty-seventh session of the Group of Experts

85. The provisional agenda for the twenty-seventh session (see sect. I) was discussed and accepted by experts. The meeting was planned for 6 and 17 August 2012, in conjunction with the Tenth Conference.

III. Organization of the session

A. Introduction

86. Pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 2009/269, the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names held its twenty-sixth session in Vienna from 2 to 6 May 2011.

B. Attendance

87. The session was attended by 170 participants from 60 countries, representing 20 of the 23 geographic/linguistic divisions of the Group of Experts. Thirteen observers were present. The list of participants is contained in document GEGN/26/4.[1] The list of documents is available online from http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/26th-gegn-docs/GEGN/GEGN-26-5-ListDocuments.pdf.

C. Officers of the session

88. The Officers of the session were as follows:

Chair:
Helen Kerfoot (Canada)

Vice-Chairs:
Brahim Atoui (Algeria)
Ferjan Ormeling (Netherlands)

Rapporteurs:
William Watt (Australia)
Leo Dillon (United States of America)

Secretary:
Timur Alasaniya

Chief, Disarmament and Peace Affairs Branch, Department for General Assembly and Conference Management

For the names of the Chairs of the divisions, see http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/divisions.html. The officers of the working groups were:

Task Team for Africa

Convener:
Brahim Atoui

Rapporteur:
Naima Friha

Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy

Convener:
Ferjan Ormeling

Rapporteur:
Roman Stani-Fertl

Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers

Convener:
Pier-Giorgio Zaccheddu

Rapporteur:
Trent Palmer

Working Group on Toponymic Terminology

Convener:
Staffan Nyström

Rapporteur:
Peder Gammeltoft

Working Group on Romanization Systems

Convener:
Peeter Päll

Rapporteur:
Caroline Burgess

Working Group on Country Names

Convener:
Leo Dillon

Rapporteur:
Trent Palmer

Working Group on Publicity and Funding

Deputy Convener:
Botolv Helleland

Rapporteur:
Peder Gammeltoft

Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation

Convener:
Ki-Suk Lee

Rapporteur:
Botolv Helleland

Working Group on Exonyms

Convener:
Peter Jordan

Rapporteur:
Catherine Cheetham

Working Group on Pronunciation

Convener:
Dónall Mac Giolla Easpaig

Rapporteur:
Caroline Burgess

Working Group on the Promotion of the Recording and Use of Indigenous, Minority and Regional Language Group Geographical Names

Convener:
William Watt

Rapporteur:
Catherine Cheetham

D. Opening of the session

89. The Chair, Helen Kerfoot (Canada), opened the twenty-sixth session of the Group of Experts on 2 May 2011. In the course of the session, the Group held 10 meetings.

90. Mazlan Othman, Deputy Director-General of the United Nations Office at Vienna and Director of the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs in Vienna, made an opening statement on the increasing importance of geographical names in a world where the use of spatial information is becoming much wider in scope in order to meet the challenges of day-to-day activities and natural and man-made disasters.

91 The Chief of the Statistical Services Branch, Statistics Division, acknowledged the efforts of the Chair and the Bureau of the Group of Experts in relation to the ongoing work of the Group and the conference preparations. The Group of Experts was complimented on its willingness to reduce the time of the sessions to the five-day format. The need to ensure the technical focus of the Group's work was stressed.

92. In her opening remarks, the Chair spoke of the legacy of the many former members of the Group, including the work of Eeva Maria Närhi and Jacob Rais, both of whom had passed away in recent months. She emphasized that the Group of Experts continued to be responsible for encouraging countries to standardize and disseminate their geographical names. In that way, it could contribute to disaster management and the provision of humanitarian aid. It must address the opportunities and difficulties presented by the large amount of unauthorized data readily available through the media.

E. Adoption of the agenda

93. The provisional agenda (GEGN/26/1) was adopted without change as follows:

1. Adoption of the agenda.
2. Report of the Chair.
3. Report of the secretariat of the Group of Experts.
4. Reports of the divisions.
5. Reports of the liaison officers and international organizations.
6. Activities of the Task Team for Africa.
7. Implementation of resolutions and activities relating to the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation.
8. Activities relating to the Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy.
9. Activities relating to the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers.
10. Activities relating to the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology.
11. Activities relating to the Working Group on Romanization Systems.
12. Activities relating to the Working Group on Country Names.
13. Activities relating to the Working Group on Publicity and Funding.
14. Activities relating to the Working Group on Exonyms.

15. Activities relating to the Working Group on Pronunciation.

16. Activities relating to the Working Group on the Promotion of the Recording and Use of Indigenous, Minority and Regional Language Group Geographical Names.

17. Geographical names and cultural heritage.

18. Issues of toponymic standardization.

19. Toponymic guidelines for map editors and other editors.

20. Other toponymic issues.

21. Preparation for the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

22. Provisional agenda for the twenty-seventh session of the Group of Experts.

23. Adoption of the report.

94. The draft organization of work (GEGN/26/12)[1] was adopted as orally amended.

F. Adoption of the report

95. The report of the session, as revised during its consideration, was adopted on 6 May.

96. Thanks were expressed to the Chair, Vice-Chairs, Rapporteurs, Division Chairs, Working Group Conveners and Rapporteurs, secretariat and conference services staff for their contributions to the session.